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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes findings from case studies that explored the implementation of the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and how it affects school district progress toward addressing the behavioral needs of students. Results are also presented on the progress districts are making on: developing accountability systems to report on the performance of children with disabilities in general scholastic activities and assessments; increasing the participation of parents in the education of their children with disabilities; providing for the participation of children with disabilities in the general curriculum; easing early childhood and secondary transitions; and preventing dropouts. Seventeen districts were visited in five states. Findings indicate there were three categories of school districts. Category 1 districts took a reactive approach to behavior management that emphasized disciplinary procedures specified by IDEA. These school districts had medium to high percentages of students who were minorities and received free and reduced lunches. Category 2 school districts shared the characteristics of Categories 1 and 3. Category 3 school districts described a comprehensive range of formal policies governing the prevention and management of behavior problems. Positive behavior support and behavioral Individualized Education Program goals were consistently available. These districts tended to be small and virtually all were in suburban areas. (Contains 19 references.) (CR)

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Study of State and Local Implementation and Impact of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

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Final Report on Focus Study I

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Executive Summary

In 1997, Congress made changes to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the landmark law that ensured educational equity for children with disabilities. As part of the IDEA 1997 reauthorization, Congress asked the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to conduct a national assessment "to examine how well schools, local education agencies, states and other recipients of assistance" were making progress toward achieving implementation of the law in nine areas, which are referred to in this study as the "nine congressional questions."

To respond to the congressional charge, Abt Associates, and its subcontractors Westat and SRI, were charged with conducting a study known as the Study of State and Local Implementation and Impact of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (SLIIDEA). A set of evaluation questions was developed to guide the study. To assist in answering these questions, we studied the use and alignment of the implementation tools – the policies, procedures and practices used by the districts to determine the progress they were making in each area of congressional interest. We defined "policies" as legislation, rules and procedures; "practice" as the activities carried out to implement the policy; and "resources" as the staff, materials and training used to implement the policy and practice.

The SLIIDEA study will collect implementation data over a four-year period through mail surveys at the state, district and school levels, and through three focus studies – case studies of selected school districts. This report summarizes the findings from the first of these case studies, in which we primarily explored the implementation of the reauthorization and how it affects district progress toward addressing the behavioral needs of students. Results also are presented on how districts are making progress toward developing accountability systems to report on the performance of children with disabilities in general scholastic activities and assessments; increasing the participation of parents in the education of their children with disabilities, including resolving disagreements; providing for the participation of children with disabilities in the general curriculum and increasing their placement in the least restrictive environment; easing early childhood and secondary transitions; and preventing dropouts.

Seventeen districts were visited in five states. As the results were analyzed, we classified the districts into three categories of implementation.

- Category I: These districts showed minimal or no evidence of use of implementation tools; inconsistencies between stated policies and actions taken; limited or minimal understanding of policy tools among stakeholder groups; stakeholder frustration and/or dissatisfaction.

- Category II: These districts showed evidence of a wider range of implementation tools; inconsistencies between stated policies and activities; inconsistencies across stakeholders on the necessary knowledge base and skills required for implementation; stakeholder frustration, dissatisfaction, and/or satisfaction.

- Category III: These districts showed evidence of a comprehensive range of implementation tools; consistent relationship between stated policies and activities; consistency across stakeholders on the necessary knowledge base and skills required for implementation; stakeholder satisfaction.

Descriptive findings on each area of congressional interest are discussed below.

Behavior

Problem behaviors among students with and without disabilities have increased in the last five years in both frequency and intensity. Educators in focus districts report that a growing number of children with disabilities also have significant behavior issues and multiple diagnoses. Nevertheless, they report that students with disabilities are no more likely to have behavior problems than students without disabilities.

The Category I districts generally took a reactive approach to behavioral issues that relied on responding individually to each individual case rather than a district-wide discipline system. These districts did not use or misunderstood such proactive behavioral measures as positive behavioral supports and functional behavioral assessments. Classroom teachers reported using behavioral approaches for individual students. Few resources were available to support staff development.

Category II districts used a wider range of practices to manage and prevent behavior problems. Use of school-wide approaches to prevent behavioral problems, coupled with a district wide discipline policy was more evident in Category II districts than in Category I. Some staff development was available to support proactive behavioral measures.

Although Category III districts reported few behavioral issues, they had a comprehensive range of policies and practices to prevent and manage behavior problems, including codes of conduct and safety plans, handbooks on discipline and guidelines for conducting functional behavioral assessments. Character development programs also were in evidence. Multiple staff development opportunities and resources were available.

Parent Participation

Most Category I districts had no formal policies to encourage parent participation, either for parents with or without students with disabilities. Nevertheless, teachers reported regular communications with parents on their children's educational progress through report cards or regular notes home. Parents were dissatisfied with services for their child with a disability. Few opportunities were available for higher-level participation, including workshops or district-level decision making. Resources to support parental participation were minimal.

Most Category II districts had informal goals to increase parent participation and some did not distinguish between parents of children with or without disabilities. The districts often had interactive communications with parents that invited feedback on student progress. The role of parents in the IEP process ranged from superficial to very involved. Workshops and printed material offering guidance to parents of children with disabilities were widely used.

Category III districts were the most aggressive in engaging parents in their children's education. Parents of students with and without disabilities participated in educational workshops and in shared

decision-making bodies at the school or district level. Parent of students with disabilities often participated in support and advocacy groups.

Curricular Access and LRE Placement

Category I districts offered either a full continuum of placements or only a full inclusion model for all students with disabilities. Policies on access to the general education curriculum were generally not clear, or did not offer individualized means for students with disabilities to gain curricular access. Usually students with disabilities were not expected to meet the same academic standards as students without disabilities.

Category II districts offered a continuum of least restrictive environment (LRE) placements for students with disabilities. These students usually were taught the same content as students without disabilities and were provided with instructional modifications if necessary. Professional development was available for special education and general education staff.

Category III districts provided a continuum of LRE placement options for students, with IEP teams determining the best placement. The districts taught the same content to students with and without disabilities and provided instructional supports and modifications as determined by the IEP team. High expectations were the same for all students. Teachers had assistance from support staff, including school psychologists and instructional aides.

Assessment

All Category I districts provided a range of assessment accommodations to students with disabilities such as setting, timing/scheduling, presentation and response accommodations. The districts, however, did not use alternative assessments for students with more severe disabilities.

Category II districts required students with disabilities to participate in assessments. Students were supported by accommodations and alternative assessments; staff was supported by professional development and by assistants with expertise.

Category III districts ensured that all students were included in state and district assessments. The students received a full range of accommodations as determined by the IEP team. Alternative assessments were available for those students with severe disabilities.

Transitions

In some districts, early transition practices consisted only of single informational sessions between the sending and receiving institutions. Districts that offered more transition services had more frequent meetings and included a broader range of specialists in the meetings. In the districts that supported early transitions well, experts were hired and relationships were developed with early childhood agencies and programs.

For secondary transitions, districts with minimal activity primarily supported meetings of staff and parents to discuss students' transitions to high school. Districts with more of a commitment to transition services offered students career exploration, skill and interest assessments, occupational training, job counseling, work-study and other services. Resources for those supplying comprehensive services included job coaches, transition specialists and work-study coordinators.

Dropout Prevention

Some of the districts had no dropout prevention services. Others used policies they believed would tangentially impact dropouts. Still others used approaches that emphasized high expectations for all students and creative problem solving. These districts used adjustment counselors, behavior plans, flexible and block scheduling, individual tutoring, vocational education, IEP adjustments and other resources.

Factors Influencing Implementation

Certain themes were apparent among districts within each implementation category. In general, similarities were most apparent on socio-economic and demographic factors for Category I and III districts. Fewer similarities were apparent in contextual factors among Category II districts.

The districts that were most often classified as Category I districts generally had medium to high percentages of students who were minorities and received free and reduced lunches. It is possible that the demands of serving high percentages of students who are minorities and living in poverty prevented these districts from focusing adequately on instructional and support issues. The Category I districts also were generally dissatisfied with the level of support they received from the state.

Category III districts generally had low numbers of students living in poverty. These districts also tended to be small, each with fewer than 10,000 students and virtually all were in suburban areas. Also of interest, most of the Category III districts were in the Northeast and in states with historic commitments to implementation for educating students with disabilities.

These findings suggest possible areas for future study. One could hypothesize that income plays an important role in how well districts are able to attend to behavior, parental participation, assessment, curricular access and placement, dropout rates and transitions. Low-income districts have more demands and fewer resources to attend to instructional issues. Size might also be a factor. Smaller districts might use implementation tools more consistently that benefit the services to students with disabilities because their attention is less fragmented. Also, the historical commitment of a state to implementation might set a standard and clarity of understanding that have a positive impact for the educational services delivered to students with disabilities and their families.

This is the first of three focus reports that will be conducted. Future studies will provide opportunities to examine the extent and reason for the findings and patterns that have emerged in the current study.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1997, Congress made significant changes to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the landmark law that ensured educational equity for children with disabilities. With access to public schools already guaranteed for 6.1 million children with disabilities, the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA set educators' and policymakers' sights on improving achievement for these students, as well as assuring positive transitions to work or post-secondary education after graduation.

As part of the 1997 reauthorization, Congress asked the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to conduct a national assessment "to examine how well schools, local education agencies, states and other recipients of assistance" were making progress toward:

- Improving the performance of children with disabilities in general scholastic activities and assessments;
- Providing for the participation of children with disabilities in the general curriculum;
- Helping children with disabilities make effective transitions from preschool to school and school to work;
- Increasing the placement of children with disabilities, including minority children, in the least restrictive environment;
- Decreasing the numbers of children with disabilities who drop out of school;
- Increasing the use of effective strategies for addressing behavioral problems of children with disabilities;
- Improving coordination of the services provided under the reauthorization with other pupil services and with health and social services;
- Reducing the number of disagreements between education personnel and parents and;
- Increasing the participation of parents in the education of their children with disabilities.

OSEP has responded to these issues by commissioning two families of studies: child-outcome longitudinal studies and topic-specific studies. The former includes studies of infants and toddlers, preschoolers, elementary school children and youth transitioning from school to adult life. The topic-specific studies cover three issues: the cost of special education; the personnel needs in special education; and how states, districts and schools are implementing the 1997 Amendments of IDEA. Abt Associates and its subcontractors, Westat and SRI, have been charged with conducting the third study, also known as the Study of State and Local Implementation and Impact of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (SLIIDEA).

To guide the design of SLIIDEA, OSEP developed a set of evaluation questions on implementation and impact to address the congressional questions annually. They are as follows:

- How do states, districts, and schools use policies, practices and resources to serve children and youth with disabilities? What factors influence the use of these policies, practices and resources?

- To what extent are states, districts and schools making progress toward achieving the outcomes?

- What is the relationship between state policy and practice, and local and school policy and practice? Do state policies affect local practices, policies and resources or the process of local change, and if so, how?

- What are the critical and emerging issues in states, districts and schools?

To address these questions, the study has focused on the following implementation tools: "policies" refer to legislation, rules and procedures; "practices" refer to the activities carried out to implement the policies; and "resources" include the staff, materials and training used to implement the policies and practices. Policies, practices and resources are the tools that states, districts and schools use to implement the provisions of IDEA.

The SLIIDEA study will collect data over a five-year period by means of mail surveys at the state, district and school levels, and through focus studies of the implementation of IDEA in selected school districts and selected topics. The design objectives of the study are to: combine the strengths of qualitative and quantitative data; select a survey sample from all states plus the District of Columbia that ensures the data can be generalized nationally to districts and schools, and that the sample be of sufficient size to allow accurate reporting at the elementary, middle and high school levels as well as on four disability categories;[1] and account for any bias due to non-response by conducting a non-response survey of districts and schools.

Currently, we are analyzing the data from the first year of survey data collection and revising the state, district and school surveys for data collection in Years 3 through 5. Three focus studies (i.e., case studies of districts) are scheduled with each one to be conducted in the spring. OSEP specified that the first two focus studies address the issues of behavioral needs of students, including students with disabilities; how to involve parents of children with disabilities in their child's education; and resolving disputes. The topic for the third focus study is yet to be determined.

Organization of This Report

We have completed Focus Study I and report its findings in this document. In this report we use data from field visits to 17 districts to learn about implementation for each congressional question. Chapter 2 describes the design and analytical approach of the study. Chapter 3 discusses the implementation tools districts use to address behavioral problems of children with disabilities. Chapter 4 examines the tools districts use to increase the participation of parents in the education of their children with disabilities. In Chapter 5, we look at the tools districts use to provide for the participation of children with disabilities in the general education curriculum and to increase the placement of children in the least restrictive environment. Chapter 6 focuses on the tools districts use to improve the performance of children with disabilities in general scholastic activities and assessments. Chapter 7 reviews district

[1] In the original design, 13 categories of disabilities were collapsed as follows: "cognitive" – specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, mental retardation and developmental delay; "behavioral" – emotional disturbance and autism; "physical" – orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, traumatic brain injury and multiple disabilities; "sensory" – hearing impairments, visual impairments and deaf-blindness.

tools for helping children with disabilities make effective transitions from preschool to school and school to work. And in the final chapter we summarize the findings and present emerging themes and issues for further exploration.

Chapter 2: Design and Analytical Approach

The Design of Focus Study I

The focus studies were designed to address two goals: 1) to describe the implementation of IDEA by focusing on the issues identified in the congressional questions by states, districts and schools; and 2) to provide in-depth information about three selected topical issues – behavioral issues faced by districts and schools, involvement of parents of children with disabilities in their children's education, and resolving disputes. We designed Focus Study I to reach these two goals by drafting evaluation questions on implementation, which are outlined in the introduction, and on the specific topic of *addressing the behavioral issues faced by districts and schools.*

The evaluation questions focus on policy implementation over time, and in particular, examine *how* states, districts and schools reached the current state of practice with the use of policies and resources. We sought to understand from teachers, principals and parents the practices that are in place or that have been well established in the system. Each of the focus studies is intended to provide information on the implementation of IDEA. We refer to this as the longitudinal component of the focus studies.

It is important to note that it was not the objective of this study to determine a district's compliance with the law. So, for example, even if we found policies, practices and resources that did not seem to comply with the legal requirements for encouraging parental participation, we made no determination and offered no comments on legality.

In Focus Study I, we examined how states and districts guide schools to address the behavioral issues of children, and we identified school practices. More specifically, we sought information on how states and districts use policies and allocate resources to help schools cope with the behavioral issues of students by addressing the following questions:

- In districts, what are the behavioral issues of most concern and what are the population characteristics of students with behavioral problems, including children with disabilities?

- What state and district policies, practices and resources are provided to guide and help schools identify and address the behavioral problems of students with and without disabilities? More specifically, how do states and districts guide schools in the use of:

    - Positive behavioral supports, including the use of functional behavioral assessments, to address the needs of students with and without disabilities who have behavioral problems;
    - Individual Educational Programs (IEPs) to meet the needs of students with behavioral problems; and
    - Disciplinary actions, including alternative educational placements, to address students with and without disabilities who have behavioral problems.

We addressed the goals of the focus studies outlined above and capitalized on SLIIDEA's multi-year time frame by dividing the subject districts into two different but overlapping groups: longitudinal sites and topical sites. These sites enable an in-depth analysis of change in implementation over time

as well as an in-depth analysis of the three topical issues. All of the districts recruited into Focus Study I were included in the analysis of longitudinal and behavioral issues.[2]

Site Selection and Recruitment

Criteria for Site Selection

Below we discuss three criteria that directed the selection of the focus study sites in Year 1: the selection of sites of interest, the nesting of sites in five states and the sampling frame.

- **Identify 'Interesting' School Districts:** The 1997 Amendments of IDEA continued to emphasize the original equity provisions of the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA), while also creating a focus on *excellence* for students with disabilities. We wanted to study districts that were still challenged in spring 2000 by the changes made to the legislation and had made little if any progress toward implementing them. This group of school districts provided an opportunity to examine the factors that impeded implementation. We also wanted to study districts that had made considerable progress by spring 2000 toward implementing the 1997 amendments. In these high implementing sites, we could examine factors that facilitated implementation.

- **The Nesting of Sites in Five States:** We chose to nest the sample of 20 school districts within five states to minimize for the effects states might have on the design. Four districts were selected in each of the five states – two high and two low implementers. A state had to contain a reasonably large number of school districts in the Core Survey sample to be considered – at least 20. Without a large number of school districts in the Core Survey sample, it would have been very difficult to identify and recruit four districts in a state that met all the criteria and would agree to participate in the Focus Study. To minimize any other unintended effects, it was also important that each of the five regions of the country be represented in the sample. All regions of the country had several states with sufficient numbers of school districts in the sample (at least 20 sites) from which to select sites.

- **The Sampling Frame:** We selected focus study sites from the full study sample excluding the districts that had formally declined to participate in the survey. Selecting sites from the field study sample enabled us to cluster the 20 districts within a limited number of states. By including several districts within a given state, it was possible to examine how state policies and practices might affect local policies and practices.[3] This design feature substantially improved our understanding about *how* the districts addressed the implementation of the issues specified in the congressional questions.

Given these site selection criteria, we followed a process for recruiting up to 20 sites.

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[2] For Focus Studies II and III, we will continue to study the sites to describe long-term implementation, by obtaining data from multiple stakeholders.

[3] Although it would have been desirable to balance the selection of districts by low and high percentages of children classified as emotionally disturbed and/or metropolitan status, there were insufficient numbers of districts in the states to achieve this balance. Our design took these factors into account after the state directors classified the sites as high or low implementers.

The Process for District Recruitment

We followed six steps to recruit districts into the study, as outlined below.

Step 1: Letters to Chief State School Officers and State Special Education Directors. We sent letters and brochures to the state education leaders and asked for their cooperation and support. One letter from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) described the study and stressed the importance of district participation. Another letter from Abt Associates provided more detail about the study, and in particular, explained the criteria for selecting focus study sites and asked the state officials to help identify candidate sites.

Step 2: Follow-up Telephone Calls to Special Education Directors. In follow-up calls we verified that the state directors had received the mailing, and we addressed any questions or concerns that they might have expressed about the study. If they agreed to participate in the study, we asked them to classify each of the survey sample districts according to the two categories of implementation. A simple rubric was used to help state staff identify the extent to which the district was making implementation progress. This rubric asked the special education director to classify the school districts that, since the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, were making substantial implementation progress and school districts that were making some progress but would not be considered sites with substantial compliance problems. By looking at sites that were making progress, we were able to follow change. To help with classification, each state director consulted with the field representative who reviews district progress.

Step 3: Examination of Sites by Implementation Categories. After reviewing how state directors classified the districts, the policy research team identified the percent of children classified in the sites as emotionally disturbed (ED) and the metropolitan status for each site. In order not to cloud judgments, senior analysts were not made aware of how the state director classified these districts. To the extent possible, our goal was to include districts with high and low percentages of children classified as ED and a range of urban, suburban and rural districts across the five states. Based on this examination, we selected for recruitment into the study four districts from each state, equally distributed across high and low implementers, as well as two additional sites for each implementation category should sites decline to participate.

Step 4: Letters Sent to the District/LEA Superintendents and Special Education Directors. Letters were sent from both OSEP and Abt Associates. The OSEP letter stressed the importance of district participation while the Abt Associates letter detailed the objectives of the focus study and included a summary of the major data collection components to be used for the site visit. The letter assured confidentiality and anonymity to the participating district sites.

Step 5: Follow-up Telephone Contact with the District/LEA Superintendents and Special Education Directors. In follow-up calls, we verified that the sites had received the mailing and addressed any questions or concerns that the district staff expressed about participating in the focus study. Abt Associates staff documented districts that refused or had special circumstances that made their participation unfeasible (e.g., restructuring of the district). Districts that declined to participate in the focus study were replaced.[4] After a district agreed to participate in the study, the team leader for data collection at the site made subsequent telephone calls to the district contact person.

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[4] The recruitment process began anew for each replacement site. Given this strategy, we did not have enough time to recruit all 20 districts.

Descriptions of the State and District Sites

Based upon the rationale provided earlier (sufficient numbers of core survey districts in the states that were being recruited and one state to represent each of the five regions), the following five states were identified and recruited for Focus Study I: Massachusetts; Michigan; New York; Oklahoma; and Arizona.

The process of identifying districts for Focus Study I, yielded on average nine potential sites per state. In our survey sample, we found no sites classified as rural districts and only 14 urban sites across the five states. We made recruitment calls to 25 sites across the five states, and recruited 17 districts from the five states. Although we planned to recruit 20 sites, the time for recruiting three additional sites was insufficient for completing the visits before schools closed.

The following information characterizes the demographic factors across the 17 recruited sites:

- **Numbers of Students:** 13 districts enrolled under 10,000 students; three districts enrolled between 10,000-40,000 students; and one district enrolled over 40,000 students.

- **Percentage of Students with IEPs:** four districts reported fewer than 7 percent of students with IEPs; 11 districts reported 7 to 17 percent of students with IEPs; and two districts reported over 17 percent of students with IEPs.

- **Percentage of Minority Students:** five districts reported fewer than 10 percent minority students; eight districts reported 11 to 35 percent minority students; and four districts reported over 35 percent minority students.

- **Percentage of Students Receiving Free or Reduced School Lunches:** eight districts reported fewer than 25 percent students receiving free or reduced school lunches; five districts reported 25 to 50 percent students receiving free or reduced school lunches; and four districts reported over 50 percent students receiving free or reduced school lunches.

- **Percentage of Students Diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance:** three districts reported having no students with behavior disorders; three districts reported under .5 percent students with behavior disorders; seven districts reported .5 to 1 percent students with behavior disorders; and four districts reported 2 percent of students with behavior disorders.

- **Highest Grade Level:** in one district the highest grade level was sixth grade; in three districts the highest grade level was eighth grade; and in 13 districts the highest grade level was 12th grade.

- **Region:** four districts were located in the West; four districts were located in the Midwest; seven districts were located in the Northeast; and two districts were located in the South.

Data Collection

Data collection *within each district* included interviews with district/school personnel; a focus group with principals; focus groups with parents in all but one district; and a review of district records, materials and student IEPs. Across the 17 districts, we interviewed up to 34 district administrators,

including the director of special education in each district, and 68 teachers who teach children with behavioral issues. We convened 17 focus groups of principals, 16 focus groups of parents whose children had IEPs with behavioral goals, and 16 focus groups of parents of general education students.[5]

We provide a brief description of each of the data collection tools used during interviews, focus study groups and document reviews.

Interviews in Each Site

A substantial portion of the information needed to describe and document the use of implementation tools taken by states, districts and schools in implementing the 1997 Amendments of IDEA provisions came from interviews with state and district administrators, as well as school personnel, including principals and teachers.

We interviewed by telephone state-level administrators in special education. The data collection team leader conducted this interview, and when possible, completed it prior to the site visit. Topics covered during the interview included identifying what states did to address the 1997 IDEA goals, with an emphasis on understanding the linkages between a state and its localities.

In face-to-face interviews, we discussed a number of topics with district administrators, including the director of special education, assistant superintendents, and depending upon the size of the district, the superintendent. These topics included the types of students with behavior problems and district responses to the behavior issues; use of functional behavioral assessments and alternative settings; district links with the state; and the district's strategies, goals and progress toward implementing the issues articulated in the 1997 amendments. We also met individually with special education teachers and general education teachers to address student behavior, school-wide plans to deal with behavioral issues, strategies for handling and preventing behavior problems, special education referrals, teacher collaboration, functional behavior assessments, use of IEPs and special education students' participation in extracurricular activities.

Focus Groups in Each Site

At each site, we asked the district liaison to identify two target schools. Target was defined as schools with higher proportions of students with behavioral problems. Principals in these schools either sent out requests for volunteers to participate in focus group discussions or the principals invited parents or teachers to attend.

We met with up to 12 school principals in each district to discuss their perceptions of common behavior problems in school and how these behaviors have changed over the last five years. We discussed the schools' approaches to the behavioral issues, including use of school-wide discipline or behavioral plans, professional development related to problem behavior and functional behavioral assessments. We also invited principals to discuss issues and opportunities associated with serving children with disabilities, including parent involvement and participation of students with disabilities in extracurricular activities.

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[5] Although the same procedures were followed for recruiting parents for the focus groups, parents did not attend the focus groups as scheduled at one site.

We convened two focus groups of parents at the sites: a parent focus group for parents of students with IEPs and a parent focus group for parents of students without IEPs. We addressed with each group their perceptions of the behavioral issues facing schools, school safety issues, how the schools address them and how they are involved with the school. For parents of children with IEPs, we also assessed how they were involved in the development of their children's IEPs, how satisfied the parents were with the services their children receive, children's progress, teachers' knowledge of children's behavioral goals or plan, and parents' communication with school personnel.

Document Review in Each Site

We asked for selected documents at each site to review written policies and guidance provided by the district to schools on the issues addressed in each of the congressional questions.

The Analytic Approach for Focus Study I

Our framework for analyzing the data collected in Focus Study I, and in particular for studying implementation, was based upon previous policy studies in special education and implementation studies in education. These studies suggest, among other things, the factors that influence implementation of education reform activities.

OSEP's predecessor, the Bureau of the Education of the Handicapped, supported several policy studies in the early 1980s to determine how local districts addressed the requirements of the landmark Education of the Handicapped Children's Act (PL 94-142). Of particular interest was a policy study on the sequence of events that occurred in districts as they implemented the new legislation (Wright, Cooperstein, Renneker, & Padilla, 1982).

The study found that districts were likely to respond to a new law by first making procedural changes that could be put in place quickly. If the goals could be accomplished by modifying existing procedures, the changes were likely to happen more quickly than if totally new procedures were required. In the next step of the implementation sequence, districts were most likely to expand the scope and comprehensiveness of their special education programs. The speed of this step's completion depended on availability of resources, primarily financial resources. In the third step, the LEAs turned to professional development usually focused on implementing the requirements of the law.

In addition, earlier research also suggests that there will be variation in the implementation across sites and across time (Stearns, Greene & David, 1980; Moore, Goertz & Hartle, 1983; McLaughlin, 1987). Congress set goals in the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA but did not prescribe how the goals would be accomplished. For example, the reauthorization sought to increase the number of students with disabilities who participated in assessments, but did not prescribe how to achieve the goal. It was therefore up to the states and districts to establish policy; use rewards, sanctions and public reporting; and offer technical assistance to ensure the inclusion of more students in the assessments. The flexibility allows states and districts to respond, based upon their local need, to such contextual factors as the size of the district, poverty rates, numbers of minority students, numbers of children with IEPs, technical knowledge of teachers and staff, and district resources.

Another study found that one of the factors influencing implementation is the clarity of the policy (Fuhrman, Clune & Elmore, 1991). The study indicated that school personnel easily absorbed or even sought to exceed new student standards, even though the standards were somewhat ambiguous. But the implementation often depended on two important factors. First, implementation depended heavily on staff competence, comfort level and technical knowledge. Second, the researchers found that implementation depended on how much the policies coincided with local district policy. When the federal or state policies did coincide with local policy, districts were often much more proactive about determining which pieces of government policies they would accept and modify. Rather than being passive entities, the districts often amplified policies around local priorities. In these instances, the political, social and economic context was of paramount importance.

Based on these findings, we studied how districts use implementation tools (policies, resources, and practices), and within these we looked for the presence of such factors as the comprehensiveness and coherence of programs, clarity and sequencing. Further, this approach led us to organizing districts into categories according to their different implementation experiences.

Data Analysis

Preparing the Data for Analysis

- **Writing Case Study Reports.** Following each round of site visits, data collectors wrote case study reports synthesizing and summarizing data from interviews, focus groups and record reviews in structured case study reporting formats. Case study reports were authored jointly by two data collectors and checked for accuracy and thoroughness during the first analytic meeting.

- **Organizing and Indexing Data.** All of the case study reports were imported and indexed using QSR NUD*IST 5.0, a software package designed to facilitate the organization and management of qualitative data.

- **Coding Data.** During a series of analytic meetings, preliminary coding schemes for each of the nine congressional questions were developed based on the conceptual framework outlined in the SLIIDEA analysis plan (*Analysis Plan: Volume I*, 2001, Abt Associates). These sample coding schemes were designed to focus analysis specifically on the key elements of implementation (i.e. policies, practices, resources and evaluation tools), as well as stakeholder perspectives. Definitions for each major element of implementation were refined at this time from those first identified in the *Analysis Plan*. Pairs of analysts were assigned responsibility for coding and analysis of individual congressional questions. The primary analyst was responsible for coding all data, and the secondary analyst ensured inter-rater reliability by coding a random sample of 20 percent of data for each question. In the case of coding discrepancies, coding teams met and resolved differences via consensus. In addition, any proposed changes to the preliminary coding scheme that arose in the process of coding were approved via consensus by both analysts. Data was coded using a "line-by-line" approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Analyzing Data
Data were analyzed independently for each of the congressional questions.

Step I - Developing Subcategories. Analysts worked in pairs to review the data coded to each major category (i.e., policies, practices, resources, evaluation tools and stakeholder perspectives), and identified "subcategories" within each category. The development of subcategories enabled researchers to identify the range and types of implementation tools available across all 17 sites. Analysts then developed a table enabling them to identify the range and types of implementation tools available *within* each of the 17 sites. During this step, analysts determined that districts appeared to cluster into three or more groups – in contrast to the two groups identified for recruitment. These clusters were based on the comprehensiveness of implementation, as well as the consistency of perspectives across stakeholders. This emerging finding resulted in the development of implementation categories.

Step II - Identifying Implementation Categories. Initially, we asked state directors to classify districts into low and high implementers, as mentioned earlier. Yet, we determined at our first analytic meeting, two categories of implementation were insufficient for describing the use of implementation tools. So, senior analysts met and developed a five-category model of implementation based upon theoretical knowledge of implementation (Bodilly, 1997; Odden, 1991). As research teams reviewed data from the 17 sites, however, it became clear that this model was too fine-grained for the district data and a refined model with three-categories instead of five was followed for the scoring. Features of the three categories follow:

- Category I – Minimal or no evidence of implementation tools; inconsistencies between stated policies and actions taken; limited or minimal understanding of policy tools among stakeholder groups; stakeholder frustration and/or dissatisfaction.

- Category II – Evidence of a wider range of implementation tools; inconsistencies between stated policies and activities; inconsistencies across stakeholders on the necessary knowledge base and skills required for implementation; stakeholder frustration, dissatisfaction, and/or satisfaction.

- Category III – Evidence of a comprehensive range of implementation tools; consistent relationship between stated policies and activities; consistency across stakeholders on the necessary knowledge base and skills required for implementation; stakeholder satisfaction.

It is important to note that how a district was categorized was based on how it was making progress towards outcomes identified in the congressional issues. For this reason, a single district could fall into several categories, depending on the issue. For example, a district might be classified as Category II on student behavior issues, but Category III on parent participation issues.

Based on these criteria, combined with the data contained within the subcategory table, analysts worked in pairs to score each site as Category I, Category II or Category III, as well as to provide brief written justifications for scores. Any discrepancies were resolved via consensus. Scores were then presented during an analytic meeting, and site report authors were given an opportunity to confirm scores or propose changes based upon additional evidence from the site visit.

At this time, analysts determined that on three congressional issues they had insufficient data for scoring sites into one of the three implementation categories. The interviews with the parents and teachers focused on behavioral issues and parent participation, and were not structured to ask them in-depth questions on additional topics. Our data only included district administrator interviews, and thus, we could not determine consistency of stakeholder experiences and perceptions within these topics. These congressional issues were: 1) helping children with disabilities make successful transitions from preschool to school and 2) from secondary school to adult life; and 3) preventing students with disabilities, especially children with emotional disturbances and specific learning disabilities, from dropping out of school.

Step III - Describing Implementation Categories. NUD*IST was used to combine data across all Category I, Category II and Category III sites. Analysts then reviewed the data and described what the categories looked like in terms of available implementation tools (i.e., policies, practices, resources and evaluation tools). At two analytic meetings, the research team presented results and recommended revisions.

Step IV - Generating Findings. Tables were created to organize: 1) demographic variables for the 17 districts and the five states in which they were located (e.g., numbers of students, numbers of students with IEPs, numbers of students receiving free or reduced lunches and numbers of minority students); and 2) contextual variables for districts and states (e.g., availability of resources, availability of policy guidance, level of integration of special education and general education departments). Information from these tables was then used to describe contextual and demographic characteristics of Category I, Category II and Category III sites to determine if any common features might explain observed patterns.

Limitations of the Findings

This report describes the implementation tools (policies, resources, and practices) used by 17 districts to address the issues identified in the nine congressional questions listed in the Introduction. Focus Study I also examines how these same districts address the behavioral issues of children with and without disabilities faced by schools. We anticipate that the combined findings from both Focus Study I and core surveys, which will be reported in the *Annual Comprehensive Report – First Year Report*, will address the nine congressional questions and establish the baseline for future data collection, analysis and reporting.

The analysis of the data collected in Focus Study I has supported the development of a three-category framework for understanding how districts have implemented the legislation. With this three-category classification, we have established an initial description of *how states, districts and schools are making progress toward* the outcomes identified in the congressional questions. We classified the districts into implementation categories by examining the presence of implementation tools (policies, practices and resources), the comprehensiveness and consistency with which districts used these tools, and stakeholders' level of understanding of these tools. A single district could be classified in several categories, depending on how it was responding to an issue.

We did not design Focus Study I to collect outcome data on the specific indicators for each congressional question. Rather, the surveys were designed to collect and report on school outcomes.[6] Also, we did not design Focus Study I to collect data on *indicators of quality* for each of the issues addressed by the congressional questions. The research literature is too fragmented to define such indicators, and guiding principles have not been developed to define model programs, such as with school reform models. Thus, our analysis falls short of establishing a normative standard against which to judge *how well* districts are performing, beyond characterizing the extent of district implementation.

We anticipate these three categories of implementation to shift over time. As districts continue to address the legislative changes, fewer or more categories may emerge for each of the issues addressed by the congressional questions.

Finally, it should be noted that because districts were not selected to randomly represent characteristics of all the nation's districts, the results cannot be generalized to the nation.

[6] In traditional impact studies, child and family outcomes are measured. SLIIDEA collects only data on organizational process and outcomes. Thus, SLIIDEA reports on the process of policy implementation of states, districts and schools. We can describe these standards of practices and profile the variation observed.

Chapter 3: Addressing Students' Behavior Issues

What the Legislation Requires

Original Legislation

The Education for the Handicapped Act, precursor to IDEA, was drafted and signed into law in 1975 to ensure that children with disabilities would have access to a public education and their families would have access to the due process procedures for ensuring these rights. Prior to EHA, children with disabilities could be excluded from school at local discretion. Over the last 25 years, the congressional intent has been achieved. Now, more than five million children receive special education and related services – close to 12 percent of the total school population (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Despite these accomplishments, school administrators and teachers have had continuing concerns about how to balance the rights of children with disabilities with the need to preserve school safety and order. On the one hand they have recognized that school officials often used speculative and subjective decision making that led to the exclusion of children from public school merely because they had been identified as having a behavior disorder. On the other hand, they have felt the need for increased flexibility to treat children with and without disabilities the same way when they break school laws and rules.

Advocates and families of children with disabilities believe firmly in the need for keeping children with disabilities in school when they misbehave and for giving them the supports necessary to succeed – particularly when the behaviors are manifestations of the children's disabilities. These views contributed to the recent language and mandates in the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA for addressing the needs of children with behavioral issues.

What Reauthorization Requires

The 1997 reauthorization of IDEA provides for the following:

- A child with a disability can be removed from school for short periods of time as long as the removal does not constitute a change in placement. A change in placement occurs when a child is removed for more than ten consecutive school days or when a child is subjected to a series of removals that constitute a pattern because they cumulate to more than ten school days in a school year.

- Beginning on the 11th cumulative day in a school year that a child with a disability is removed from his or her current placement, the school district must provide services determined necessary to enable the child to appropriately progress in the general curriculum.

- A child with a disability cannot be suspended long-term or expelled from school for behavior that was a manifestation of his or her disability.

The 1997 reauthorization broadened the authority of school personnel to remove a child with a disability who brings a gun to school to include situations involving all dangerous weapons, the possession of illegal drugs, or the sale or solicitation of the sale of controlled substances while at school or a school function. Under these circumstances, school authorities can unilaterally remove the child for up to 45 days at a time. In addition, if school officials believe that a child with a disability is substantially likely to injure self or others in the child's regular placement, they can ask an impartial hearing officer to order the child be removed to an interim setting for a period of up to 45 days. New provisions also allowed school officials to request a hearing officer to keep the child in an interim alternative educational setting for an additional 45 days if it is deemed that it would be dangerous for the child to return to school because the child would injure himself or others. Officials also can request subsequent extensions.

Importantly, the 1997 reauthorization: 1) added requirements that schools assess any child's troubling behavior – i.e. those with and without disabilities – and develop positive behavioral interventions to address that behavior; and 2) described how to determine whether the behavior was a manifestation of the child's disability. If a child with a disability has behavior problems that interfere with his or her learning or the learning of others, the IEP (Individualized Education Program) team must consider whether strategies, including positive behavioral interventions[7] and functional behavioral assessments[8] are needed to address the behavior. If the IEP team determines that such services are needed, they must be added to the IEP and must be provided.

Why IDEA Was Amended

Public concerns about school safety and preventing violence and aggression in schools are at an all-time high. Consequently, districts and schools have chosen to focus more directly on ensuring safety in schools and establishing positive school environments where students respect both teachers and peers and assume responsibility for their actions. Moreover, school administrators specifically have expressed concern about the conditions under which children with disabilities might be removed from school if they were considered to be dangerous to themselves or others. The 1997 reauthorization articulated congressional support for striking a balance between the need that in certain instances

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[7] Supported by OSEP, a consortia of universities have established seven principles of a positive behavioral intervention and support system (PBIS). These principles are: behavioral expectations are defined; behavioral expectations are taught; appropriate behaviors are acknowledged; inappropriate behaviors exhibited by individuals are corrected; schoolwide teams use school and student evaluation data to take action; key administrators are actively involved in the implementation of the schoolwide system; and individual systems are integrated into the schoolwide discipline systems. (PBIS Consortia, 2000). A difference between PBIS and traditional approaches to behavior is that PBIS focuses on changing the environment, while traditional approaches focus primarily on changing the person.

[8] Functional behavioral assessments are an approach for identifying problem behaviors and the events that can predict the conditions under which those behaviors would occur or not occur (Sugai, Horner, Dunlap, Hieneman, Lewis, Nelson, Scott, Liaupsin, Sailor, Turnbull, Turnbull, Wickman, Ruef, & Wilcox, 2000).

school districts desired increased flexibility to deal with safety issues but that maintaining due process protections in IDEA is essential.

The 1997 amendments, and the Department of Education's regulations that followed, were also influenced by research that shows that if teachers and other school personnel have the knowledge and expertise to provide appropriate behavioral interventions, future behavior problems can be reduced or avoided (Sugai, et al., 2000). Thus, there is a need for state and local educational agencies to work to ensure that superintendents, principals, teachers and other school personnel are equipped with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to appropriately address behavior problems when they occur.

What We Observed

The Children and Their Behavioral Issues

All 17 districts reported a wide range of problem behaviors among students with and without disabilities, although the degree of severity varied from site to site. Districts consistently reported that the following behavioral issues were most common: aggression, teasing, bullying, fighting, lack of respect for authority and disruptive behaviors within the classroom. Although not consistent across all districts, the following problem behaviors also were reported by two or more districts: difficulty staying on task, not turning in homework assignments, tardiness, truancy, threats, smoking and inappropriate sexual behavior.

Seven districts reported more serious student behavior problems such as drug abuse, gang activity, violence, stealing objects, bringing weapons to school and lack of parental support. One principal described students as "streetwise," noting that, "We have a lot of really tough kids, and this is probably the toughest elementary school in the country." Several other districts reported that all of their schools were "lockdown facilities," implying that school security also was a serious concern. These districts tended to be in areas where high numbers of students received free or reduced prices for lunch, and where teachers and administrators frequently attributed problems to community-wide factors such as poverty, single-parent homes and neighborhood violence.

Stakeholders consistently reported that problem behaviors among students with and without disabilities have increased in the last five years in both frequency and intensity. As one principal noted, "Schools mirror society. Instead of road rage, we have recess rage." Administrators in one district reported that behavior problems were having an increasingly negative impact on teachers and that more than 50 percent of teaching time was now spent on behavior management. Another principal said, "Good kids are getting better, but problem kids are getting worse." And finally, one administrator reported that in his administrative position, he felt like a "911 operator," as most of his day was spent taking calls from principals who were challenged by children's behavioral problems.

Educators reported that the characteristics of students with disabilities enrolling in schools over the past five years have changed. A few years ago, students placed in special education programs generally were diagnosed under only one disability category, such as mental retardation or emotionally disturbed, and were diagnosed after entering school. Today, district administrators and

school staff reported an increase in the number of children coming to school with significant behavioral and learning problems; with existing and multiple diagnoses, such as bipolar diagnosis; and with existing medical needs. These younger children are often diagnosed with autism or with pervasive developmental disorders, including diagnoses of aggressive, defiant, and/or depressed behaviors. According to a district administrator, the children's needs are much more complex than those of children who entered the school system just five years ago.

Stakeholders suggested a variety of reasons for the increase in frequency and intensity of behavioral problems. Recurring themes included violence in the media, frequent violence at home or within the community, and insufficient support from the student's home environment. In these instances, administrators in particular reported on demographic changes in their districts. More households had two parents working and commuting longer distances to work, or a single parent present and also working. In sum, parents had many demands on them, including to "be there" for their child. Another recurring theme was the effect of the Columbine incident. In five districts, members of all stakeholder groups reported that in the aftermath of Columbine, it was increasingly necessary to take students' verbal threats seriously. For example, administrators in one district were piloting an evaluation tool to learn how to assess the seriousness of a threat for determining the type of action school personnel should take.

Significantly, stakeholders did not report that the behavioral issues were only associated with children with disabilities. In fact, they consistently reported that special education students and general education students were equally likely to exhibit problem behaviors. Administrators and teachers tended to agree that students with disabilities were less likely than their peers to have serious behavioral problems. For instance, one teacher remarked that "special education students are a non-factor," another noted that special education students were "more compliant and work harder," and a third commented that students with disabilities were not only better behaved, but more readily owned up to bad behavior than their nondisabled peers.

Summary of the Types and Ranges of Implementation Tools Observed

In analyzing the implementation data for all 17 districts, we identified the policies, practices, and resources each district used to address behavioral issues of students with and without disabilities. These implementation tools are described below.

Policies

Both formal and informal policies were available for using proactive and reactive approaches to behavioral issues of children. In general, these types of policies focused on the use of positive behavioral supports (PBS)[9] and discipline for all students, as well as the use of behavioral IEP goals for students with disabilities. When districts wrote *proactive* policies for addressing behavioral issues, the districts had established behavioral expectations for the children in the system with the intent of

[9] In our visits with school districts, we found that the districts and schools used varying principles of PBIS, but did not embody the specific model articulated by the PBIS Center. In our report, we use the descriptions used by district and school personnel when describing their behavioral programs, and when available, we describe the principles associated with the behavioral program. Thus, our use of the term, positive behavioral supports (PBS) may be considered imprecise by readers familiar with the PBIS Center.

also teaching them the expected behaviors. By setting proactive policies on behavior, the districts had established how they expected children to conduct themselves with the goal of preventing behavior problems. When districts developed *reactive* approaches to behavior, the policies focused on responses to behavioral issues and inappropriate behaviors exhibited by children. In particular, districts established consequences for inappropriate behaviors. For example, districts reported proactive policies such as the use of character development programs, [10] use of functional behavioral assessments and development of behavioral IEP goals, as well as reactive policies such as suspension and expulsion procedures. Both proactive and reactive policies are appropriate for districts to have in place, but they are used differently.

Practices

Districts reported **district-wide**, **school-wide** and **classroom-wide** practices that may or may not have been consistent with existing policies. As with policies, the practices included both proactive and reactive approaches to addressing behavioral issues. More specifically, districts reported on the use of positive behavioral strategies, the incorporation of behavioral goals in the child's IEP, and use of functional assessments. These practices included a variety of behavior management strategies for supporting desirable behaviors, including teaching appropriate behaviors, teaching replacement strategies for children who consistently display inappropriate behaviors, using consequences for inappropriate behaviors and supporting collaborative planning for teachers. Typical examples included character development programs such as "Make My Day" and "Caught Being Good" targeting specific age groups, rewards for appropriate behavior, anger management classes for select students and the use of a functional behavioral assessment to identify the source of students' problem behaviors. In addition, districts also reacted to behavioral issues and put in place reactive procedures and practices, such as the use of specific intervention for a crisis, and use of in-school and out-of school suspensions and Saturday detentions.

Resources

Resources primarily included training opportunities for school personnel and the hiring of skilled staff, often with specialized training in behavior management. Other resources included written materials offering guidance, and opportunities for teachers to collaborate with one another. One state supported a new technical assistance center on use of PBS.

Distribution of Sites Across Implementation Categories

States and districts varied in their use of implementation tools to address the changes required in IDEA's reauthorization. They established policies, practices or allocated resources as a strategy for supporting schools to make the changes. Yet, often the state and district personnel were uncertain about the changes required by the new law.

[10] Character education programs are designed to help students grow as moral beings, and to equip them with the internal resources to act effectively on that desire. Educators need to help students develop a deep regard for themselves and for others, an abiding commitment to the core values of justice and caring, and the resolve to live by and speak up for what they believe while also hearing, understanding, and accommodating the beliefs of others.(Schaps, Schaeffer, & McDonnell, 2001).

This is a natural process. As state and district personnel grapple with changes and how to address them, some confusion and a need for clarity and innovation to reach the goals inevitably occur (Schiller, et al., 2001). Our visits to school districts illustrate the variation in state and district responses.

Based upon the comprehensiveness of the district's use of the implementation tools and consistency of perspectives across the stakeholders, we categorized the 17 districts into three implementation categories. Three districts were categorized as Category I, 11 were categorized as Category II, and three were categorized as Category III. In general, the use of policy tools in response to behavioral issues was the least comprehensive among Category I districts; more comprehensive among Category II districts, albeit inconsistently applied across and within schools; and both comprehensive and consistently applied among Category III districts.

In addition, districts in Category I most often described only reactive or punitive practices to children's inappropriate behaviors. Although Category II districts reported both reactive and proactive approaches to behavior, within the district the use of any of the approaches by schools was fairly inconsistent. Category III districts described both proactive and reactive responses to behavior problems, and supported the use of non-aversive strategies whenever possible. And while Category III districts did not report on the need to use reactive practices, the districts had established practices for implementing them.

A Profile of Category I Districts: Behavior Issues Abound, but Responses Are Reactive and Focused at the Classroom

Category I districts tend to encounter the most serious behavior problems, including community violence and gang activity, yet these districts are the least likely among the districts studied to have implemented comprehensive policies and practices for preventing problem behaviors.

In these districts, there is a virtual absence of district- or school-wide practices such as character development programs. Rather, the responses are teacher-driven. And although individual teachers report using positive reinforcements for appropriate behavior at the classroom level, their responses to problem behaviors tend to be reactive rather than proactive.

Finally, resources are minimal, and both teachers and administrators report such implementation barriers as inadequate training for school staff and too few support staff with specialized training. In spite of the fact that stakeholders express varying degrees of dissatisfaction and frustration with the present situation, no Category I districts report that any goals are in place for changing the status quo.

Administrators, teachers and parents in Category III districts consistently reported satisfaction with an awareness of existing policies and practices. Also, the use of resources – in particular training, time for staff collaboration, specialized staffing or written materials to support school staff – was not evident in Category I districts; only some of these practices were used by districts in Category II; and all were used in Category III districts.

Description of Three Categories

Category I

Demographic and Geographic Variation

Category I schools had few common demographic features. In fact, the three Category I districts represented the extremes in terms of their demographic features. Two districts had under 10,000

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students[11] of which 11-35 percent were minority students and reported high percentages of children classified as seriously emotionally disturbed.[12] One of these two districts was situated near a well-regarded center for treating autistic children. Many families moved to this community for these services, and as a result, this district had placed over half of its special education population in either the residential or day treatment program. Also, these two districts varied in the percentages of students who received a free or reduced lunch, with low to average percentages of students receiving free and reduced lunch. [13]

The third district was different from the other two. First, it enrolled close to 25,000 students, including a high percentage of minority students and high percentage of children on free and reduced lunch. And second, this final district reported few children classified as emotionally disturbed.

Each of the three districts was situated in different states. The stakeholders reported that when state guidance was provided to districts, the focus was only on due process and procedural requirements of the legislation, rather than providing guidance or resources on how to use positive behavioral supports and strategies in schools and classrooms.

Given this wide variation, a cluster of common descriptive characteristics did not emerge for the three districts. What the districts did share, however, was the perception among stakeholders that behavior problems were frequent and intense and that state agencies did not appear to provide any direct resources or guidance on how to address behavioral issues of children. Although districts reported different challenges, each district had significant demands stemming from the composition of the student population. Across Category I districts, there was variation in the numbers of children on free and reduced lunch, the numbers of children with racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds, and the numbers of children classified as emotionally disturbed.

Policies

The Category I districts reported having at least one **district-wide** policy relating to behavioral management or prevention. Often established in the last three years, these policies were tied to state standards and were focused on meeting the due process requirements of the 1997 amendments of IDEA on discipline. To communicate these policies to stakeholders, districts copied materials from the *Federal Register* and distributed them to parents and district staff.

Most of the district policies in Category I tended to reflect a reactive approach to behavior management that emphasized disciplinary procedures specified by IDEA. The district-wide policies are described below.

- **Positive Behavioral Supports:** Only one Category I site mentioned having a **district-wide** policy on positive behavioral supports. The policy required that school personnel develop a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIPs) to address inappropriate behaviors of students with and

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[11] The size of districts quoted in this report relies on data reported in the Common Core of Data, U.S. Department of Education.

[12] Sources in this report for data for percent of minority students and students classified as emotionally disturbed come from 1998-1999 Survey on Special Education, Office of Civil Rights Sources.

[13] Sources of data for free and reduced lunch in this report come from the Orshansky Poverty Index.

without disabilities, including a team approach, data collection on student behaviors from multiple settings, instruction for the student to learn alternative behaviors for replacing the inappropriate behavior, and the monitoring and evaluation of the instructional strategy. In practice, however, stakeholders reported that BIPs was neither supported nor implemented. No Category I sites described any other district-wide policies supporting prevention of behavioral problems or approaches to responding to behaviors.

- **Discipline:** All three sites reported having **district-wide** policies on discipline for students with and without disabilities. One administrator described the district's approach as a conduct policy that dealt primarily with rules regarding dress code, drug and alcohol abuse, and weapons. In another district, **state** guidelines were specified for determining if the inappropriate behavior resulted from the child's disability; and a third district cited a **state** policy of Zero Tolerance for threatening school staff, students, and/or school property. All three policies, either initiated by the state or district, described procedures for handling violations committed by students of district and school rules. Two districts described policies on the use of a functional behavioral assessment (FBAs) as part of the disciplinary process and cited IDEA regulations regarding disciplinary action after removing a student with disabilities from school for more than 10 days. In both cases, FBAs were used after the incident occurred, rather than as tools for the prevention of inappropriate behaviors.

- **IEP Goals:** Only one district described a policy specifying behavioral goals in IEPs for children with behavioral issues. The district stated that **district-wide** policy was to integrate both behavioral and academic goals, but this policy did not appear to be implemented with any degree of consistency according to multiple stakeholders.

Practices

Practices supporting behavior management and prevention were minimal, reactive rather than proactive, and tended to focus on punishment of inappropriate actions rather than reinforcement for more appropriate actions of students. Furthermore, the majority of practices were managed most often at the **classroom level**, rather than the school or district level, resulting in inconsistency both within and across schools and dependent upon the classroom management skills of the teachers.

- **Positive Behavioral Supports:** None of the Category I districts reported using PBS as a **district-wide** means for addressing behavior problems. Teachers at all sites reported **classroom-wide** practices involving positive reinforcements for appropriate behavior such as prizes for completing homework and stickers for good behavior. **Classroom-wide** strategies for handling problem behaviors, however, were generally punitive, such as the use of time-outs for individuals or missing recess for incomplete work. A small number of schools within one district reported a **school-wide** approach, including a focus on a team orientation and data-driven interventions, but these schools were the clear exception to the rule.

- **Discipline:** All Category I sites reported some type of **district-wide** activity relating to discipline of students with and without disabilities. For instance, the response to behavioral infractions at two sites was based on a system of progressive discipline, including time outs, lunch detention, after school detention, in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension.

Other disciplinary practices at the three Category I districts included Saturday detention and discipline plans for children classified as emotionally disturbed.

Category I districts either did not use FBAs, or expressed numerous misconceptions about its purpose. For instance, although the use of FBAs had recently been instituted at the **district level** at one site, teachers appeared to be unaware of what an FBA was, the circumstances under which an FBA would be appropriate or required, or whether an FBA had ever been conducted on one of their students. Administrators at another site reported that staff had been trained in the use of FBAs, but teachers were unfamiliar with the practice, and a school psychologist reported that "FBAs are only conducted when a student is being expelled." In other words, school personnel seemed to be under the impression that if they wanted to expel a child, they had to complete an FBA. It was not used as a tool for establishing a behavioral program for students.

- **IEP Goals:** There appeared to be no consistent practices within or across Category I districts relating to behavioral IEP goals for students with disabilities. Practices relating to IEP goals generally occurred at the **school level** and were characterized by inadequate training and misconceptions about the IDEA requirements. In one district, behavioral goals were not based on formal evaluations; in another district teachers had not been trained on current state standards for the development of behavioral IEP goals; and in a third district, the same behavioral goals were assigned to all students diagnosed with behavior disorders irrespective of individual needs.

Resources

Few resources were available at Category I districts to support the implementation of behavior management programs. When resources were available, administrators and teachers disagreed on the extent of its availability. Although administrators at all Category I sites reported that **school-level** staff had received some training in either general classroom management, writing behavioral IEP goals or conducting FBAs and discipline, teachers at all three sites reported a lack of necessary training to work with children with behavioral issues. According to teachers, when training was provided, the focus was on the paperwork associated with the legislative requirements rather than on concrete strategies for teaching children with behavioral problems.

Administrators from two districts reported the presence of specialized support staff, including prevention specialists, counselors, social workers or behavior specialists to assist school staff with behavior problems. For example, teachers reported that when a consulting teacher or psychologist became involved due to a special education referral, there was a greater likelihood that positive behavioral supports would be integrated into the student's behavior intervention plan. Again, however, teachers at both districts reported that given the intensity of the behavior problems within classrooms, not enough specialized support staff were available to help.

Factors Influencing Implementation

All Category I districts reported a wide range of barriers to the successful implementation of behavior management programs. The following barriers were consistent across all Category I districts:

- **Inadequate Staffing:** There was insufficient staff to meet the support needs of teachers.

- **Lack of Training & Information for School Staff:** Teachers and administrators in all Category I districts lacked training in the use of positive behavioral supports and the development of behavioral IEP goals. Furthermore, during interviews with school personnel, teachers and administrators often expressed misconceptions about the purpose of behavior prevention tools such as PBS and FBAs. Stakeholders agreed that resources in the form of policy guidance and funding for training of school staff were simply not available at the state or district level.

- **Lack of Training and Information for Parents:** Parents, too, appeared to lack accurate information about their rights and the rights of their children with disabilities, particularly regarding discipline and expulsions. For instance, in one district a parent of a child with a disability said "children had been sent home for the entire year," and in another district a parent reported that out-of-school suspensions were a "way for the school to abdicate responsibility for students, and its use is too widespread and too often." Yet in neither case were parents aware that there were alternatives for dispute resolution.

- **Community-wide Barriers:** Category I districts attributed behavior problems in part to sources outside the school system, including gang problems, crime, violence and unsupportive home environments. In one extreme example the principal described the neighborhood in the following terms: "Ninety percent of our kids' parents are below the poverty line and most are in single parent homes. A big percentage of our dads are in prison, so we're talking about a completely different ballgame where we are. And seven prisons are within a mile-and-a-half of the school, so we're talking about a school like no other around here." Families, on the other hand, claimed district and school personnel were unavailable, except under formal venues such as the IEP meeting, and disrespectful to them during meetings.

- **Lack of Goals:** Despite dissatisfaction with the current situation, no Category I districts reported having any goals addressing behavioral issues. One district, however, had invited input from private and public organizations to guide them through a restructuring process to improve the outcomes of the students served by the district, suggesting the district recognized that outside expertise would be beneficial.

- **Lack of State Guidance:** All three districts indicated a need for support from the state. While desiring support, none was aware of the OSEP supported Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support Center.

Category II

Demographic and Geographic Variation

Like Category I districts, the 11 Category II districts varied in terms of their demographic features. Seven of the districts enrolled under 10,000 students, reported up to 50 percent of children on free and reduced lunch, and reported up to 1 percent of children classified as emotionally disturbed. Of the remaining three districts, one large, urban district reported high percentages of children classified as emotionally disturbed, receiving free and reduced lunch, and having over 36 percent minority

students; and two districts had student enrollments between 10,000 and 25,000 students, with under half a percent of children classified as emotionally disturbed. These two districts varied in the percentages of children receiving free and reduced lunch – one low and one high. Category II districts were located in each of the five states of the study.

A Profile of Category II Districts:
School-wide Use of Behavior Management Programs, but Resources for School Staff Is Insufficient

In Category II districts, the links between policy and practice are more apparent than in Category I, and these districts are more likely to use a range of implementation tools. In general, Category II districts use **district-level** policies supporting such practices as PBS and FBA, as well as discipline policies.

The districts also use a range of both **school-wide** and **classroom-wide** strategies for addressing behavioral issues of students with and without disabilities, and although school personnel are not necessarily familiar with terms such as PBS and FBA, they frequently describe strategies that mirror components of these behavior management systems. For instance, schoolwide approaches tend to include: 1) character education programs designed to prevent behavior problems by defining and teaching behavioral expectations; and 2) codes of conduct explaining school rules and the consequences of violating them. Furthermore, teachers within individual classrooms frequently use positive reinforcements as a way of acknowledging and rewarding appropriate behavior of individual students.

Most Category II districts report some availability of resources, including training or presence of behavior specialists. Also, administrators, teachers and parents tend to agree that while behavior is an increasingly serious problem, special education teachers are adequately prepared and supported to handle problem behaviors and general education teachers require more support than is available at the school or district level.

Policies

All Category II sites reported having at least one district-wide policy focusing on behavior management or prevention. Most Category II districts described formal policies relating to conducting functional behavioral assessments and the development of behavioral IEP goals. Policies also focused on disciplinary procedures, such as suspension policies. As with Category I districts, however, these policies did not appear to be part of a comprehensive and coherent response to behavioral issues, but rather isolated responses to specific concerns.

- **Positive Behavioral Supports:** Most districts reported the existence of informal PBS guidance in schools or classrooms, although it was unclear if a district-wide policy actually supported its use. In these instances, administrators and school staff reported using positive reinforcements to encourage all students to do well. Two Category II sites stated that there was no district-wide policy related to Positive Behavioral Supports.

- **Discipline:** Most Category II districts described formal policies for discipline of students with and without disabilities. For instance, several Category II districts described formal discipline procedures at the district level, whereas others described suspension policies, "codes of conduct," and Zero Tolerance policies at the school level. Five of the Category II sites reported district-wide policies supporting the use of FBAs whenever a pattern of behavior problems emerged or when behavior interfered with learning.

- **IEP Goals:** Eight Category II districts reported having policies governing the development of IEP behavioral goals for students with disabilities. Three sites had specific district-wide policies relating to students with emotional disturbances, such as requirements that the IEP contain specific behavioral goals and objectives for them.

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Practices

A wider range of practices supporting behavior management and prevention were available at the Category II level than Category I, particularly in terms of efforts to create positive school environments as a means of reducing problem behaviors. Most activities at Category II districts were implemented at the **school or classroom level** with policy guidance on discipline and using the IEP from the district. Like Category I districts, however, Category II districts tended to respond punitively to behavior infractions, and rarely did Category II districts mention the use of PBS as a tool for preventing or responding to inappropriate behaviors.

- **Positive Behavioral Supports:** Certain components of a PBS system were available across Category II districts, although sites did not use the whole complement of PBS services included in the model and often used different terminology to describe their strategies. The majority of Category II districts described the **school-wide** use of character development programs for students with and without disabilities such as "Character Counts," "Make Your Day," "Caught Being Good," and "Crisis Prevention Institute," all of which are based on principles of a PBS model. These principles included: expectations are defined; appropriate behaviors are acknowledged; inappropriate behaviors exhibited by individuals are corrected; key administrators are actively involved in the implementation of the school-wide system; and school personnel are trained to use the school-wide system. Several districts mentioned that they encouraged schools to choose from an array of possible programs and to manage them at the **school level**. Other **school-wide** efforts to prevent behavior problems included anger management classes, "Boys Town Social Skills" programs, and school-wide Student Assistance Teams designed to focus attention on identifying and intervening at the first sign of problem behaviors. In addition to **school-wide** efforts, teachers within Category II districts frequently described the use of **classroom-wide** strategies to address problem behaviors, including point systems, token economies, behavior rubrics and positive reinforcements for individual students. As one teacher noted, "I really try to keep it contained, deal with [problem behaviors] in my classroom."

  In terms of FBAs, there appeared to be some degree of use, albeit inconsistent, across most Category II districts. Several Category II districts stated that FBAs were conducted not only when a student was at risk of long term suspension, but also whenever a pattern of behavioral problems emerged or when behavior interfered with learning. A number of Category II districts with policies in place governing the use of FBAs, however, showed no evidence of FBAs being conducted or utilized at **the school or classroom level**: teachers were not familiar with the term, and behavior plans were not based on the results of FBAs. Furthermore, no districts reported using FBAs for students without disabilities. One Category II district used the term "risk assessment" to describe a process similar to conducting an FBA. Individuals responsible for conducting FBAs and risk assessments varied across sites and included school psychologists, social workers, counselors and special education teachers.

- **Discipline:** Most districts described one or more activities relating to discipline of students with and without disabilities. Examples include codes of conduct governing student behavior, lockdown procedures, in-school suspension, Saturday detention and the use of FBAs as part of disciplinary procedures when a student was at risk for long term suspension. The comments of one principal illustrated the attitude of "zero tolerance" toward rule violations

when he said, "We've had to be real hard-nosed and the kids didn't like it. But they got in line quickly." The attitude was common in most Category II districts.

- **IEP Goals:** Almost all Category II districts described the use of behavior intervention plans and/or behavioral IEP goals for students with disabilities, and most described team processes for developing goals. The value of IEP goals, however, varied both within and across sites. For instance, behavioral goals were not always shared with general education teachers, and a number of parents expressed concern that behavioral goals were not being used as frequently or consistently as they ought to be. For instance, one parent reported teachers "don't have a clue" when it comes to the content of students' IEPs. Another concern of both parents and teachers was that over half of Category II sites described using "goal banks," "goal menus" or "IEP goal books" to develop students' behavior plans. Selecting goals from a predetermined list suggested to them that the IEP is not considered to be individualized for the student. Finally, behavior intervention plans and FBAs were often not attached to IEPs, but instead were placed in the student's file at the central office. As a result, teachers were often unaware of the student's IEP goals, including behavioral plans.

Resources

Most Category II districts reported the availability of some resources, including at least one of the following:

- **Training of Staff:** Administrators across most Category II districts described training opportunities for staff to support behavior management programs, conducting FBAs and writing IEP behavioral goals and objectives.

- **Written Materials:** Several Category II districts described booklets outlining how to address the behavior problems of students with disabilities, how to conduct FBAs, and how to implement positive behavioral supports.

- **Availability of Specialized Support Staff:** Three Category II districts described the availability of additional personnel such as behavior specialists or school psychologists to support teachers or administrators in instructing students with behavior problems.

- **Programs for Students with Behavior Problems:** Two Category II districts described the development of additional school-based programs to meet the behavioral support needs of students with disabilities such as pervasive developmental disorder, autism and Asperger Syndrome.

Factors Influencing Implementation

Stakeholders reported the following barriers and opportunities influencing implementation across Category II districts.

- **School-based Decision Making Affects Approaches:** Districts seem to differ on whether decisions on how to address behavioral issues were made at the district or school level. While discipline policies were articulated at the district level by most of the districts, decisions to

implement more proactive approaches to behavior were often made at the school level to match the needs of the students.

- **Inadequate Training for General Education Teachers:** Although most special education and general education teachers felt adequately prepared to work with students who had behavior problems, some general education teachers did not. Furthermore, parents at five Category II districts felt that teachers' responses to behavior problems were reactive and ineffective. One parent remarked, "Teachers do not have the skills to work with behavior disordered students."

- **Tensions Between General and Special Education:** Although stakeholders agreed that special education students had no more behavior problems than their peers, general education teachers and/or parents of nondisabled children at five sites complained that students with disabilities received preferential treatment. For example, one parent felt that teachers were "more lenient" with children who had disabilities and another reported that the policy created a "double standard." Teachers complained that the "district feels coerced," into treating children with disabilities differently than the general population. And one principal reported that the use of manifestation determination "puts us into a dilemma" by creating friction between general and special education staff.

- **Lack of District/State Policy:** Four Category II districts cited lack of district or state policy guidelines as a barrier to implementation.

Category III

Demographic and Geographic Variation

The three Category III districts were located in two states in the Northeast and enrolled under 10,000 students. Up to 35 percent of the student population was minority, and fewer than 25 percent of the students received free or reduced prices for lunch.

Policies

All Category III districts described a comprehensive range of formal policies governing the prevention and management of behavior problems, including codes of conduct and safety plans; handbooks on discipline for students with disabilities; and guidelines for conducting FBAs, developing behavior intervention, making referrals, and developing behavioral IEP goals.

A Profile of Category III Districts: Behavior Problems Are Rare, Strategies Are Comprehensive

Problem behaviors are rare and not a matter of great concern in Category III districts. Nonetheless these districts use comprehensive approaches to prevent and respond to problem behaviors among students with and without disabilities. Further, the policies tend to be **district-wide**, and although a number of practices are implemented at the **district level**, most are implemented at the **school or classroom level**.

Like Category II districts, all Category III districts use character development programs as a means of cultivating positive school environments. Unlike Category I and II districts, however, all Category III districts use long-term policies supporting PBS, non-aversive responses to problem behaviors and systematic use of FBA as a means of preventing more serious behavior problems.

Multiple resources such as personnel and training opportunities are available in all these districts, and stakeholder groups share consistently positive impressions of the policies and activities currently in place. Both administrators and teachers report familiarity with PBS and FBA. Teachers say they receive adequate support for behavior management and prevention, including release time for collaboration on behavior plans. Parents, meanwhile, are supportive of district and school efforts.

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- **Positive Behavioral Supports:** All Category III districts reported policies supporting PBS and/or the use of FBAs. For instance, one district distributed a handbook that explained when and how FBAs should be used and promoted PBS as a tool for preventing behavior problems. Two Category III districts described district-wide character development programs such as "CORE Values," and the third district described a variety of school-wide character development programs, although it was unclear whether formalized policies supported these programs.

- **Discipline:** All Category III districts described formal discipline policies for students with and without disabilities. For instance, two districts published lists and/or handbooks of rules and consequences. Another site described the state-wide program "Project SAVE" (Schools Against Violence in Education), which requires districts and schools to have safety plans and codes of conduct.

- **IEP Goals:** Two districts described policies governing the development of IEP behavioral goals for students with disabilities. For instance, at one site district-wide policy emphasized the development of three to four comprehensive goals that integrated academic and behavioral objectives. At both sites, changes to policy regarding behavioral goals had either recently been made, or were in the process of being made to better align with IDEA recommendations.

Practices

The three Category III districts described a wide range of practices supporting the prevention and management of behavior problems, although some sites implemented activities more consistently, and arguably more meaningfully, than others. Two types of activities were consistently available across districts: 1) PBS, including character development programs and FBAs; and 2) behavioral IEP goals. One district reported using discipline guidelines.

- **Positive Behavioral Supports:** Although districts did not necessarily use the term PBS, all described non-aversive strategies for addressing behavior problems, as well as "proactive" attitudes toward behavior intervention for students with and without disabilities. For instance, one principal described behavioral problems as "learning opportunities." Two districts reported longstanding policies and practices supporting PBS, and described a school-based approach to the development of positive behavior plans, behavior charts and the use of positive reinforcements such as compliments, computer time and snacks. The third district reported numerous **school-wide** initiatives encouraging positive behaviors, such as "Caught Being Good" and "Random Acts of Kindness," as well as **classroom-wide** reinforcements such as popcorn parties or "breakfast-in-a-bag," but did not use all components of PBS.

All Category III districts employed character development programs at either the **district or school level**. Furthermore, all districts described one or more programs providing students with an opportunity to discuss issues such as teasing, cultural differences and peer pressure in a small group setting facilitated by a teacher or guidance counselor. Districts also described programs tailored to particular age groups – for instance, one district offered different programs to elementary, middle and high school students. Examples of programs included the "Bully & Victims" program, "CORE" values, "Open Circle," prevention programs and a wide range of **class-room or school-wide** practices

such as good citizen awards, systems of demerits for rule infractions, mentoring programs, peer mediation and service learning projects.

All Category III districts reported using components of FBAs. In each case, either school psychologists or guidance counselors were responsible for handling observations, and meetings were held to discuss findings with both special education and general education teachers, as well as parents. Across all districts, FBAs appeared to be used rarely and – as with Category I and II districts – only for students with disabilities.

- **Discipline:** Only one district reported using disciplinary practices. This district reported distributing a handbook to all students at the beginning of the school year detailing disciplinary codes, and a "Saturday School" for high school students who had accumulated a certain number of demerits.

- **IEP Goals:** All Category III districts reported practices for developing behavioral IEP goals. The goals were usually designed based on input from a team of professionals, and most general and special education teachers reported that behavioral goals and interventions were useful in the classroom. Two districts reported efforts to integrate academic with behavioral goals, although teachers at one of the sites reported that this rarely occurred. Another district reported selecting behavioral goals from computer-assisted goal books, leading to generic goals that were often the same from one year to the next.

Resources

Resources were allocated in multiple ways to support teachers and administrators.

- **Skilled Staff in Adequate Numbers:** All Category III districts reported the availability of school psychologists, guidance counselors, and/or classroom-based advisors to provide individualized support to students as needed. For instance, in one district each school had a full-time psychologist who handled crisis management, supported teachers and families, served as a liaison between families and community agencies, and provided counseling to children with behavioral difficulties.

- **Training Opportunities for Staff:** All Category III districts described training opportunities for staff. These included information on rules and regulations pertaining to behavioral issues, and often concrete guidance on disciplining students with disabilities, implementing PBS programs and using FBAs.

- **Printed Materials:** Two districts reported the availability of printed materials providing guidance on behavior management and intervention.

- **Opportunities for Collaboration:** Two of the three sites reported the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues to discuss behavioral issues, develop behavior intervention plans and engage in other activities.

Factors Influencing Implementation

Category III districts reported few barriers to implementation, and those that were reported were relatively minor. In addition, several factors contributed to successful implementation.

- **Few Behavioral Issues:** Stakeholders across all Category III districts reported that behavior problems were rare, and that student behavior was not a significant concern.

- **Adequate Training and Support:** Most teachers in Category III districts reported receiving adequate support for behavior management and intervention. In particular, teachers reported opportunities to collaborate with one another – especially special education teachers and general education teachers – as well as familiarity with behavioral strategies and interventions.

- **Lack of Systematic Approach to Behavioral IEP Goals:** Although teachers reported overall satisfaction with behavior management and prevention programs, some expressed concerns about the overall quality of behavioral IEP goals, thereby presenting a slightly less positive perspective than administrators. Teachers in one district reported that schools did not address PBS in a systematic way and were critical of the generic academic and behavioral goals generated by the district's computer-assisted goal books. In another district, administrators reported that classroom teachers regularly used goals, whereas teachers reported that goals did not provide concrete implementation guidelines and were therefore not particularly useful. In contrast to Category I and II districts, however, their concerns were about quality of the IEP goals rather than the basic IDEA requirement that behavioral goals be included in the IEP.

- **Infrastructure Supporting PBS:** All Category III districts consistently described the presence of a long-term infrastructure that supported the use of PBS at the **district level**. This infrastructure included sustained leadership by directors of special education and psychologists assigned to schools. The special education directors had been in their positions from five to 20 years. Psychologists worked with principals, teachers, and families to resolve problems or prevent them from occurring. Although districts in Category I and II reported on district staff presence, the numbers were insufficient for meeting the needs in the schools. Category III districts provided sufficient numbers of support staff such that stakeholders consistently acknowledged their contributions to the schools. Given the size of these districts (i.e., student enrollment under 10,000), this type of ongoing and personal support contributed to establishing an infrastructure to support students and their families, including students with disabilities and school staff.

Chapter 4: Encouraging Parents to Participate in Their Children's Education

What the Legislation Requires

Original Legislation

The landmark Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) established a number of procedures designed to provide parents with a significant role in ensuring the free, appropriate public education of their child with a disability. Under the requirements of the law, before the child was identified as being eligible for services, parents had to give consent for an evaluation. If they did not agree with the results of the evaluation, they had the right to obtain an independent educational evaluation, which, under certain circumstances, would be paid for by the school system. If the evaluation indicated that a child was entitled to services, the parents became part of the team that developed the IEP and their consent was required for their child's initial special education placement.

In addition, schools had to notify parents when they proposed to initiate or change the identification, evaluation or educational placement of the child. Parents had the right to inspect and review all education records relating to their child. Parents also had the right to challenge or appeal any identification, evaluation or placement decision. Taken together, these procedures were a formidable and unprecedented acknowledgement of parents' rights to be involved in their child's educational planning and service delivery.

What Reauthorization Requires

In the 1997 amendments to IDEA, Congress gave parents important roles in the identification and evaluation of individual children with disabilities, and in the development, implementation and revision of educational programming for these children. The legislation provided the following rationale for the amendments:

"Over 20 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by... strengthening the role of parents and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home." [1997 IDEA amendments, Section 601(c)(5)(B)]

The 1997 amendments continue and expand the previous provisions about parents' rights to participate in their child's evaluation and placement. The original legislation, P.L. 94-142, did not require schools to involve parents in decision-making on whether a child was eligible for special education and related services. Under the reauthorized IDEA, parents are specifically included as members of the group making the decision regarding a child or youth's eligibility for services. Similarly, under the original legislation parents had the right to consent to or refuse decisions regarding their child's initial placement, but the law did not require that they be on the team making placement decisions. The reauthorized IDEA explicitly states parents' rights to be involved in all placement decisions regarding their child. They have the opportunity to examine records pertaining to

their child and they have the right to invite any individual "with knowledge or special expertise" to be on the IEP team. In addition, parents need to provide informed consent for their child to be reevaluated; previously, parent consent was only required for the child's initial evaluation.

Parents also have the right to be regularly informed on their child's progress at least as often as parents of children without disabilities. The reports must identify whether the child is making sufficient progress toward his or her annual IEP goals. If the reports show unsatisfactory progress, the IEP Team must meet and address "any lack of expected progress toward the annual goals and in the general curriculum, as appropriate" [Section 614(d)(4)(A)(ii)(I)].

The new law gives parents a role in decisions determining if a child's disciplinary problems are a manifestation of the child's disability. Parents may appeal and request a hearing on the manifestation determination and interim alternative placement actions.

Beyond being involved in their child's education, parents of children with disabilities are encouraged by the 1997 amendments to work in other ways as partners with educators and policymakers. Parents may become involved in policymaking at the state level: as members of the State Advisory Panel; and as partners with the state education agency (SEA) in developing and implementing the state program improvement grants. Parents are to participate in decision making at the local level as well, specifically through involvement with the school-based improvement plans that local education agencies (LEA) can submit to obtain IDEA funds to improve educational and transitional results for children with disabilities.

Why IDEA Was Amended

Changes to IDEA reflect a strengthening of the longstanding federal commitment to parent involvement in the education of their child with a disability. With the 1997 amendments, Congress has attempted to move this involvement further toward a partnership role. Changes in the law represent an effort to ensure that school officials consider parents as decision-making partners in the undertaking of providing special education and related services to their child. A new requirement places responsibility on parents to express their concerns to the LEA or SEA prior to requesting a due process hearing. This allows the state and district to be informed and, presumably, to take actions that may resolve a problem without the formality and expense of a due process hearing. Thus, changes in the law, including provisions that require that mediation be available to parents, were designed to save money and reduce discord by encouraging parents and educators to work out their differences using non-adversarial means.

What We Observed

Summary of the Types and Ranges of Implementation Tools Observed

We reviewed the policies, practices, resources and evaluation tools used by districts to encourage parents' participation in their children's education. Across all 17 districts, we observed the following:

Policies

Districts reported a range of both formal and informal policies, some that mirrored the procedures spelled out in IDEA and some that went beyond the requirements by offering more explicit guidance on how to encourage parent participation. For example, a district that regularly notified parents of their children's educational progress or of matters related to the scheduling of their IEP conferences represents one level of supporting parental participation. But a district that required teachers to monitor and record parent contact with phone logs showed how districts can involve parents more aggressively in educational decision making.

Practices

A wide range of practices was available across districts, some targeting all parents and some specifically targeting the parents of children with disabilities. Practices targeting all parents included parent/school communication (such as phone calls, report cards, parent/teacher conferences and "Friday Folders"), volunteer opportunities (such as fundraising or volunteering in the classroom), school functions (such as back-to-school nights and holiday parties), workshops and opportunities to contribute to school and district-wide decision making. Practices targeting parents of students with disabilities included parent/school communication, involvement in the IEP process, workshops, support networks (including Special Education Parent Advisory Councils and parents of students with disabilities who have received training on how to help other parents understand their rights in IEP meetings), and the opportunity to participate in parent advisory committees.

Resources

Resources available across districts included workshops targeting either parents or educational personnel, printed materials such as handbooks and pamphlets, and funds to support accommodations such as transportation to parent/teacher conferences or scheduling of alternate meeting times to fit parent work or childcare needs. Evaluation tools included surveys of parent satisfaction and tools to monitor parent/school contact.

Distribution of Sites Across Implementation Categories

On the basis of the data collected through the focus study, we defined three levels of district implementation of the legislative requirements for parent participation. In general, Category I districts were characterized by a lack of opportunities for parent participation and low levels of parent involvement; Category II districts were characterized by a wider range of opportunities for parent participation combined with either low levels of parent involvement or high levels of parent dissatisfaction; and Category III districts were characterized by a wide range of opportunities for parent participation and high levels of both parent involvement and parent satisfaction. Six districts were categorized as Category I, six districts were categorized as Category II, and five districts were categorized as Category III.

Description of Three Categories

Category I

Category I districts varied widely demographically and geographically. Three of the six were in low-income areas with an enrollment of over 36 percent minority students. Of these districts, two reported

relatively high proportions of students with behavior problems, and the other reported high proportions of students with limited English proficiency. Districts ranged in size from small (under 10,000) to large (over 40,000).

The other three Category I districts were located in moderate-income areas, with an enrollment of between 11-35 percent minority students. One district reported a high percentage of students with behavior problems. All three districts were small.

Policies

The majority of Category I districts had no formal policies to encourage parent participation. One district, for example, said it historically stressed the involvement of parents in their children's education, but it had no specific outreach policy for students with disabilities. As a result, parents of children with and without disabilities were usually the ones who initiated contacts with teachers and district staff when the parents had questions about their children's progress.

There were, however, a few exceptions among Category I districts. For example, one district distributed memos clarifying the changes in the 1997 IDEA amendments, noting the need to provide parents with quarterly reports about their children's progress in achieving their IEP goals and objectives. The same district also provided guidance on how to encourage parent participation in IEPs. The memo said, "Coordinators must make numerous attempts to ensure parent participation at the IEP meeting, including parent-invite letter, social worker reminder and classroom teacher reminder."

A Profile of Category I Districts:
Policies and Practices Are Limited; Parental Participation and Satisfaction Are Lacking

Most Category I districts offer limited opportunities for parent participation and as a result have low rates of involvement. District administrators say they encourage participation, but they typically have no formal policies for reaching out to parents. Some, however, are looking more closely at the 1997 amendments to IDEA and advising staff that they need to be more aggressive about enlisting parent participation.

Practices targeting parent involvement tend to be traditional and to treat parents as passive recipients of services and information, rather than as active contributors to the educational process. Practices focus primarily on parent/school communication, social functions and opportunities to volunteer in the classroom.

Resources are limited. The districts are not offering parents opportunities to participate in educational workshops, which would give parents information on what the districts are trying to accomplish and how parents can become partners in improving the educational environment for their children. Similarly, parents are not taking part in district-wide decision making, so they do not feel engaged in the educational process.

Educators and parents consistently voice frustration about each other. Parents say they are unwelcome, that they don't know their rights and that their children are not receiving the services they should receive. On the other side, educators say it is difficult to engage parents and that their well-intended efforts are not succeeding.

Although educators and parents generally agree that resources are minimal and efforts insufficient, parent satisfaction and participation are rarely monitored or evaluated in way that might result in improvement of resources and efforts.

Several Category I districts encouraged schools to prevent the escalation of disputes parents might have with them, but no formal policies were in place. In general, these districts encouraged parents to discuss directly with teachers or district-level special education staff any concerns the parents might have about their children's education

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Practices

District practices for outreach were similar for parents of children with and without disabilities. Teachers reported regular efforts to apprise both groups of parents of their children's educational progress. The districts, however, offered few opportunities for higher-level participation in such activities as workshops or district-level decision-making. And both sets of parents observed that the district had done little to reach out specifically to them.

- **Practices Targeting All Parents:** One type of practice targeting all parents was reported consistently across Category I districts: **parent/school communication** on children's educational progress. Category I sites typically communicated with parents by quarterly report cards, and parent/teacher conferences. While not consistent across sites, several districts also offered a limited range of school-wide activities designed to include parents. Examples included **social events** such as watermelon feeds and holiday parties, as well as **opportunities to volunteer** in classrooms or attend PTA meetings.

  No Category I districts reported opportunities for parents to attend educational workshops or to assume an active role in school- or district-level decision making. Although one district deviated from the typical Category I activity pattern – reportedly offering transportation incentives and alternate meeting times – parents who were interviewed reported that the district did nothing to reach out to them. These parents were unaware of any of the opportunities for involvement reported by district-level administrators.

- **Practices Targeting Parents of Special Education Students:** Two types of practices targeting parents of special education students were reported consistently across Category I districts: **parent/school communication** regarding children's educational progress and **involvement in the IEP process**. Teachers communicated with parents in weekly or quarterly reports on student progress, phone calls and parent/teacher conferences. Occasionally parents interacted with teachers when implementing behavior programs at home. For instance, at one site parents reported working in concert with teachers to implement a point system so that reinforcements used in school were continued at home. Most Category I districts also described using parent/school communication as a primary strategy for preventing disputes from escalating.

  No Category I districts reported offering workshops for parents of children with disabilities, or opportunities to network with other parents of special education students. One district deviated from the typical Category I activity pattern. District administrators said they sent out fliers for **Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC) meetings** and distributed **printed materials** to parents of children receiving special education services. According to parents, however, none had ever received a SEPAC flier, nor were they aware of any resources available to them or their children.

Resources

Resources to support parent participation at Category I districts were minimal or nonexistent. For example, none of the Category I districts provided such resources as educational workshops for parents, or professional development that gave teachers skills in improving participation of parents.

Examples of existing resources included a Special Education Parent Helpline List directing parents where to call with various special education issues, and funds from a local drugstore to support one school's volunteer program for parents of students with and without disabilities. The same district that offered the Helpline List also published a newsletter five times a year that reaches all parents and a school calendar. Also, while this district maintained a Web site to publicize district initiatives and practices, the site contained no additional information for parents of special education students.

One district noted that state resources did exist for encouraging the participation of parents who have children with disabilities. These resources included a state-wide Parents Information Network and Parent Advisory Council, which were used to notify parents about mediation and IEP issues. Such services were important to parents because they helped them become more effective advocates for their children's education, and they advised parents of rights they might be unaware of, or rights that they might find difficult to interpret. It was unclear, however, whether the district did anything to make parents aware of these resources.

Evaluation Tools

Use of evaluation tools for monitoring parent participation and satisfaction at Category I districts was minimal or nonexistent. Several years ago one district conducted a door-to-door survey regarding community-wide perceptions of the school, which included responses of those with and without students in the school system. Another district reportedly conducted annual surveys of parent satisfaction, which solicit opinions from parents of students with and without disabilities. The district used the surveys to help evaluate principals' ability to handle parent concerns at the school level. Otherwise, no Category I districts appeared to use surveys of parent satisfaction as tools for dynamic self-assessment.

Perspectives on Parent Participation

Across Category I sites, educators consistently described parents as "uninvolved" and "uninformed" even as parents blamed schools for failing to include them. For example, at one site school personnel said they had a very hard time getting parents involved, whereas parents in the district said they felt the schools often made them feel unwelcome. Details are provided below.

- **Parents' Perspectives:** Parents reported frustration, citing dismissive behavior on the part of school staff, lack of teacher communication and lack of information on parental rights.
  - A parent reported that when she approached a general education teacher about her child's learning needs, the teacher said, *"That is your problem – I am not a special education teacher."*
  - A parent of two special education students, who also is a teacher in the district, said, *"We're not making sure general education teachers know what to do with included kids. The district needs to educate teachers on those inservice days."*
  - A parent of a student with disabilities complained that her child was suspended 10 days for an infraction, while other students received no punishment for the same infraction.

She reported that she *"wasn't aware of any legal protections for children with disabilities with regard to discipline."*

- Because of poor or infrequent communication with teachers, it was difficult for some parents of students with disabilities to understand why their children were not succeeding. One parent took two weeks off from work so that he could observe his child's classroom.

- **Educators' Perspectives**: Educational personnel reported that their efforts to involve parents in their children's education often were fruitless.

  - A veteran teacher said his school has tried to involve parents with a multitude of activities, including craft days for children and parents, socials and pairing up parents with students as reading partners. The teacher attributed low attendance to the fact that many students live with extended family members rather than parents. She said only three of 22 students in her class live with their father and mother. A high school principal in the district estimated that overall 20 percent of children did not have parents who actively provided care for them.

  - A principal at one site noted, *"It's rare to get parents to come in."*

  - Some principals said students with and without disabilities often don't behave in school because their parents are not managing behavior at home. *"The teacher, the school – everyone is accountable for their part, but the parent isn't."*

Factors Influencing Implementation

There were five major barriers to parent participation reported by stakeholders in Category I districts:

- **Lack of Opportunities and Resources**: Parents reported a limited range of opportunities for their participation. In one district, they expressed frustration with schools because they offered no resources – such as workshops – that could help them better understand their children's learning and behavioral issues. Parents at another site expressed a desire to know more about how to help their children do school work, as well as a desire for opportunities to learn about the rights of their children with disabilities.

- **Disenfranchised Parents**: Many parents of students in Category I districts felt disenfranchised. They indicated they were not more actively involved in their children's education because they had a sense that school personnel did not care about their needs. One parent of a general education student reported being denied the opportunity to volunteer at his daughter's school. Another group of parents complained about a principal who "hung up the phone" and refused to speak with them when they called, and made derogatory comments about students with emotional disorders.

- **Lack of Training and Time**: Stakeholders across Category I districts reported that teachers lacked adequate training for working with parents, as well as sufficient time to spend with

parents. As one administrator remarked, general education teachers need to learn "what their role is" in working with parents of students with disabilities.

- **Community-wide Barriers**: Administrators and teachers consistently reported socioeconomic barriers to parent participation, including poverty, parents who were working multiple jobs and single parent households. A parent at one district remarked, "Some parents are so overwhelmed by everything else other than their kid – they just can't do it [i.e., attend parent/teacher conferences]." Administrators from two additional districts suggested that parents who did not have positive school experiences may themselves be reluctant to get involved in their children's education.

- **Lack of District Goals**: In spite of limited opportunities for parental involvement and low levels of parent participation, no Category I districts reported any goals for improving parent participation.

Category II

Demographic and Geographic Variation

Few demographic and geographic patterns emerged in the six Category II sites. For instance, one Category II district was in a low-income area, enrolled over 36 percent minority students, and reported relatively high percentages of students with limited English proficiency; another Category II district was in a high-income area, enrolled under 10 percent minority students, and reported relatively low percentages of students with limited English proficiency.

A Profile of Category II Districts: Links Between Policies and Practices Are Better, But Results Are Still Inconsistent

Category II districts typically use a wide range of policies and practices to encourage parent participation. They not only communicate regularly to parents about the progress their students are making toward achieving their educational goals, but the correspondence with parents is more interactive, often inviting responses.

Category II districts use such resources as workshops and printed materials to educate parents about their rights and inform them about the variety of program options available to their children. Furthermore, these districts use evaluation tools such as surveys to gauge parent satisfaction and logs to monitor parent contact and participation.

Better engagement, however, does not necessarily mean that parents are perceived as better partners. District personnel variously describe parents of students with disabilities as well informed and sophisticated, or myopic and litigious.

For their part, parents experience a range of emotions about their school experiences. Some express dissatisfaction with the range of options available to them, noting that they still feel their opinions are unwelcome; others say they are recognized as full partners in the IEP process and in crafting an education plan for their children.

Half the Category II districts were in low-income areas, and the other half were in moderate- to high- income areas. Three districts reported low enrollment of minority students (under 10 percent), two reported average enrollment (11 to 35 percent), and one reported high enrollment (over 36 percent). Four districts were characterized as small (under 10,000) and two as medium (10,000 to 40,000) in size.

Policies

Most of the Category II districts had policies that encouraged parent participation, but they varied in level of formality. Most districts informally noted that they had stated goals to increase parent

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participation, and some added that their policies did not make distinctions between parents of children with or without disabilities.

Formal policies generally went beyond mere encouragement of parent participation, often providing guidelines for participation or requirements for school accountability. For instance, the superintendent in one district required that each school address the goal of "increasing meaningful parent participation" in its school improvement plan. In this district, results of parent surveys for the last six years were used to determine how well schools were achieving their parent participation goals. Another district had a longstanding policy that required schools to educate parents about their role in their children's education and to encourage their participation in their children's IEP process, evaluation, reevaluation and placement.

Several districts also mentioned policies that addressed dispute resolution. One district, which didn't have any written policies on the subject, encouraged personnel to negotiate with parents and to bring in mediators over matters of disagreement. Others said they actively solicited parents' opinions at every level of a child's evaluation, IEP development and placement to minimize misunderstandings that can lead to disputes.

Practices

For both groups of parents – those who had children without disabilities and those who had children with disabilities – Category II districts offered many opportunities for communication about children's educational progress. In the Category II sites, these opportunities tended to be interactive, inviting feedback from parents. The difference between the two groups of parents was most noticeable in the types of activities they participated in. Parents of children with disabilities were more likely to participate in activities that advocated for certain accommodations or education programs, whereas parents of children without disabilities were more likely to participate in fundraising or social activities.

- **Practices Targeting All Parents:** Category II districts offered a broad range of opportunities for parent participation, but again, the only types of practices that occurred across sites were **parent/school communication** on children's educational progress. Strategies for involving parents in their children's educational planning tended to be more interactive at Category II sites than at Category I sites, however, with teachers frequently inviting feedback and active participation from parents. For instance, rather than merely calling or sending notes home to inform parents of their children's progress, teachers often sent home communication notebooks and "Friday folders" – end-of-the-week summaries of student work – that encouraged parents to respond. At one site parents reported that the schools were "responsive to parental input regarding children's education," and parents at another site reported that communication notebooks went back and forth each day.

  Other types of practices included **workshops** for parents focusing on educational topics, as well as more traditional practices such as **social events, opportunities to volunteer** as "room parents" and **fundraisers**. Significantly, parents seemed to appreciate workshops focusing on educational topics. At one site, administrators reported that practices typically focused on academics and "teaching parents to teach their children." The first of six workshops on this topic attracted over 200 parents.

Parent Advisory Councils often established at the school level also offered opportunities for parent-school communication. Although Category II districts generally reported opportunities for parents to play a more active role in their children's educational programming than did Category I districts, none offered opportunities for parents to engage in school- or district-level decision making.

- **Practices Targeting Parents of Special Education Students:** As with Category I sites, Category II sites were characterized by the following practices: **parent/school communication** regarding children's educational progress and **involvement in the IEP process**.

  Communications between parents of students with disabilities and schools were typically interactive and more frequent than in Category I districts. Parents received Friday folders and notebooks calling for responses from parents. The frequency of communication, depending on the student and teacher, could be weekly or even daily through phone calls, letters home or informal conversations with parents when they dropped their students off at school.

  The role of parents in the IEP process was inconsistent within and across sites. For instance, in one district, parents reported that they felt comfortable enough with the IEP process to request changes in the program implementation or goals. In another district parents were given the opportunity to review the IEP before the meeting and in some cases met four or five times with school officials before a final IEP draft was created. Still others saw the IEP for the first time at the IEP meeting and were expected to sign it without necessarily understanding it.

  Even within the same district there could be variation in the level of parent participation in the IEP. In one district, for example, some parents reviewed the completed IEP before the meeting, while others signed it after seeing it for the first time during the meeting.

  One district was exploring new ways to engage parents in their children's education. The district was reviewing technologies that would allow parents to offer homework help to the children, thereby bridging more effectively the home and school learning experience.

  Although not consistent across sites, a number of sites reported that **Special Education Parent Advisory Councils** were available, providing parents of children with disabilities an opportunity to meet and support one another, as well as to advocate for their children's needs. Such involvement was generally welcomed, but occasionally some administrators felt threatened by parents functioning as an organized group. In one district, the director of special education reported abolishing the SEPAC as a way of managing "overly involved" parents. He said he found that parent groups tend to become overly "myopic" in their view of issues and opportunities – concentrating more on their own children's individual needs rather than viewing problems holistically. Instead, the parents of children with disabilities participated in district-wide decision-making teams.

  The focus of parent participation sometimes differed among those with and without children who had disabilities. In one district, parents of children with IEPs were more likely to

advocate for a particular education program or for certain accommodations. Parents of children without disabilities, however, were more likely to participate in fundraising or social activities, including phone trees to legislators on school budget issues, bake sales and PTA meetings.

In terms of dispute resolution, the majority of Category II districts – like Category I districts – reported that their primary means of preventing disputes from escalating involved communicating directly with parents. While not consistent across sites, other activities included hiring an attorney for parents and encouraging mediation.

Resources

Most Category II districts described the availability of one or more types of resources to support parent participation. The two most widely available types of resources included: 1) **workshops** on educational issues targeting either parents or teachers; and 2) **printed materials** such as handbooks and pamphlets providing guidance to parents of children with disabilities.

The special education director in one district prepared staff for the 1997 amendments to IDEA through a series of staff development activities. The activities addressed legal requirements of the amendments using materials from the National Association of State Directors of Special Education and other professional organizations. The workshops covered the new requirements pertaining to parent/guardian involvement in general, as well as involvement in the IEP process.

One district prepared guidebooks for parents attending IEP meetings. The guidebooks advised parents of their rights and described programs and options available to students with disabilities.

Individual districts also mentioned such resources as providing funds to schools to support **accommodations** for parent/guardian participation in IEP meetings. Accommodations included transportation assistance, babysitting services and alternate meeting times.

Evaluation Tools

The majority of Category II districts mentioned the use of evaluation tools. Evaluation usually took the form of either: 1) a **survey of parent satisfaction** used to measure district progress and make changes to existing educational programs; or 2) communication logs to **monitor parent contact.**

In one district, educational specialists surveyed parents about their satisfaction with the specialists' services. So, for example, physical or speech therapists surveyed parents and then used the responses to make adjustments in their service offerings. Another district surveyed parents every year and achieved high response rates – about 85 percent. The results helped individual schools evaluate their parent involvement.

In some districts teachers were required to keep logs of parent contacts through telephone, letter, meeting or periodic student progress reports.

Perspectives on Parent Participation

Two patterns of responses about parent involvement generally emerged in Category II sites. In the first, district administrators said they offered a wide range of opportunities for parent involvement,

but parent participation nonetheless remained low. In the second, district administrators claimed to offer a wide range of opportunities for parent involvement and reported high levels of parent involvement, yet parents were not completely satisfied with the range of opportunities available to them. Details are offered below.

Parents in the focus groups expressed moderate satisfaction with opportunities for participation, although sometimes with qualifications.

- One parent said that parent participation might increase if activities shifted from fundraising to workshops on topics relevant to parents.

- Some parents stressed that they must be "proactive" if they want to get the information and services they need. At one site they said it had been necessary to take an increasingly active role in advocating for services. At another site a parent remarked, *"A lot of it is you have be to be determined enough to say 'I want this and I want that' because sometimes the feeling is that they're not going to do anymore than you push to make them do."*

- In one district, parents said they felt more welcomed at the elementary school than at the middle school level.

- Parents in one district said they were very satisfied with the efforts to include them in IEP meetings. In another district they said they write their own academic goals for their children and then help IEP team members formulate goals.

- Some parents were not satisfied with efforts to integrate children in general education settings. In one district, parents said schools were becoming increasingly reluctant to provide such services. *"Five years ago, they were willing to allow interaction ... the principal got an aide to pull him out to go to a mainstream classroom. Last year they said no to an aide."*

Educators offered a range of perspectives. Some bemoaned low parent participation rates, while others indicated that parents were becoming more knowledgeable about their rights.

- A high school principal said that unless a student was facing the possibility of not graduating, it was often difficult to get parents to participate in their children's education.

- In one district, educators uniformly agreed that parents were very well informed about their rights and responsibilities, and schools were responsive to their input and participation. In this district, educators agreed that parents of students with disabilities were more likely to participate in their children's education than parents of children without disabilities.

- *"We intimidate them, even though we try not to,"* said a special education director in one district. A principal in the same district said, *"Overall we welcome parents to come in and visit and we welcome volunteers. Some take us up on it, but 20-25 percent don't show up to IEPs and it is getting worse."*

- A special education director in one district said he believes IDEA *"makes false promises to parents, encouraging parents to believe that should the district follow all of the mandates the child will be cured."*

Factors Influencing Implementation

Barriers to parent participation in Category II districts tended to be more subtle than barriers in Category I districts, often relating to attitudinal rather than material aspects of the school system.

- **Attitudinal Barriers:** Across Category II districts, parents reported that school personnel exhibit attitudinal barriers, including prejudice toward special education students and their parents. For instance, parents at one site reported that teachers had "zero tolerance" for children with behavioral disorders. At one site, for example, a parent recalled that her older son "had an altercation with other kids and they [the teachers] put him facing a wall and waited two hours to call me." At several other sites parents reported feeling "uninvited" or "unwelcome" in the schools. These tensions between general education and special education departments were illustrated by the following remark from a general education teacher: "We are spending an awful lot of money on special education, and I think it's unfortunate sometimes that we can't spend some more on the other end of the spectrum."

- **Need for Parents to be "Proactive":** Across Category II sites parents repeatedly noted the need to be "proactive" to ensure that their children's educational needs were met. As one parent remarked, "If it weren't for parents staying on top, kids would not get what they need." Parents at another site reported that while they were pleased overall with the quality of services within the district, they often had to push and become very vocal to receive the services their children needed. At a third site, parents noted that schools were becoming increasingly reluctant to provide special services such as instructional aides.

- **Inconsistency of Implementation:** Stakeholders across Category II sites reported inconsistency in the degree to which teachers kept in close contact with parents, as well as the degree to which they involved parents in the IEP process.

- **Lack of Bilingual Resources:** At one site, which had recently experienced an influx of Portuguese speaking families, teachers and administrators reported that they were having difficulty finding printed materials and interpreters who could intervene on behalf of Portuguese-speaking parents.

Category III

Demographic and Geographic Variation

Clearer demographic and geographic patterns emerged among Category III sites than either Category I or Category II sites. All Category III sites were in above average income areas, as measured by the percentage of students receiving free lunches. All were small districts with under 10,000 students and four of the five districts reported low proportions of students with limited English proficiency. Furthermore, the percentage of minority student enrollment ranged from low (under 10 percent) to average (11 to 35 percent).

Policies

Three of the five Category III districts specifically described having formal policies for supporting parent participation. One district, for example, had formal policies that included directives to schools to "develop a home-school communications program in an effort to encourage all forms of parental involvement." The district's policies also included requirements that schools determine how to involve parents who have disabilities themselves. Another district said the state requires at least one parent member to sit as a parent advocate on the IEP team, in addition to the parent. These parent advocates receive training from the district on how to help parents understand their rights at IEP meetings.

A Profile of Category III Districts:
With Adequate Resources, Policies and Feedback Mechanisms, Parents and Schools Become Partners for Success

Category III districts are distinctive because they make an effort to include parents in educational decision making – not only at the individual level for the benefit of their children, but also at the school and district level. Educators consistently report high levels of parent involvement; parents, teachers and administrators generally report satisfaction with school/parent relationships.

Most have formal policies for supporting parent participation. The policies address such issues as home-school communications, parent representation on critical policymaking bodies and how to encourage participation of parents who have disabilities.

Category III districts also offer a wide range of resources supporting parent involvement. These include workshops focusing on educational issues, as well as printed materials.

Parents in these districts receive regular communications from teachers, whether their children or having problems or not. The communications tend to be interactive. Face-to-face or telephone contact is more the norm than in Category I or II districts. Attendance at IEP meetings is very high.

These districts also appear somewhat more likely than other districts to encourage mediation as a way of handling dispute resolution. They report few incidents of parents and schools reaching an impasse over student assignment or services.

Almost all the districts conduct annual surveys of parent satisfaction or monitor levels of parent participation. The surveys confirm high levels of satisfaction. When problems surface in survey responses, the surveys become instruments for pushing improvements in the system or for making adjustments to personnel.

In addition to supporting the broader goal of encouraging parent involvement, one of the districts required teachers and principals to monitor parent contact through the use of phone logs. Specifically, high school teachers were expected to turn in monthly logs of phone calls they made to parents of students with disabilities.

Practices

We observed similarities and differences in how parents of children with and without disabilities participated in their children's education. Both sets of parents were highly engaged in reciprocal communications with teachers about their children's schooling. Both groups also took advantage of educational workshops, although the workshops attended by parents of students with disabilities tended to focus on special needs advocacy and rights. Also parents of students without disabilities participated in district-wide decision-making committees, whereas parents of students with disabilities were more focused on participating in support and advocacy networks.

- **Practices Targeting All Parents:** All Category III districts offered a wide range of opportunities for parent involvement, and four types of practices were consistently available across districts:

  1) Category III districts placed high value on **parent/school communication** regarding children's educational progress. In addition to phone calls, quarterly reports, and parent/teacher conferences, however, teachers from most Category III districts reported

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sending home daily notebooks to facilitate ongoing communication with parents, as well as making home visits and sending e-mail communications. Administrators tended to expect and encourage teachers to call parents regularly, and a principal at one site reportedly stressed at nearly every faculty meeting the importance of keeping parents informed. As a result, almost all parents described frequent contact from their children's teachers regarding both positive and negative events at school, and one teacher reported "constant phone calls back and forth between teachers and parents."

2) Like Category I and II districts, Category III districts also offered a range of traditional practices such as **opportunities to volunteer** in the classroom, library or school office. Other representative practices included attendance at PTA meetings, chaperoning on class trips, helping out at special events and attending **social events** such as parent nights.

3) Unlike Category I and II districts, Category III sites consistently offered educational **workshops** for parents. Furthermore, several Category III districts reportedly offered incentives designed to increase parent participation including alternate workshop times to accommodate parents' varied schedules, as well as transportation, childcare and bilingual interpreters.

4) Finally, Category III districts were distinctive in offering opportunities for parent involvement in **school and district-wide decision making**. For instance, in several districts a Parent Advisory Council met regularly with the district administrators to participate in district-wide goal setting. At other sites, parent representatives sat on all district committees and contributed to decisions regarding hiring, curriculum and professional development. A third district described shared decision-making teams at both the school and district level.

- **Practices Targeting Parents of Children with Disabilities**: All Category III districts offered a wide range of opportunities for parents to be involved in the education of their children. Four types of activities were consistently available across districts:

  1) As with Category I and II sites, Category III sites encouraged frequent **parent/school communication**. In one district, the report cards that special education students received eight times a year included written progress reports focused specifically on their IEP goals. In addition, about 25 percent of these students received weekly progress reports at their homes. When needed, teachers in this district implemented parent-teacher "write-back" journals, generally at the elementary level. A teacher at another district said some of her children's parents received weekly or even daily reports.

     According to a district administrator, the percentage of parents who met with staff face-to-face either at the school or home was "in the high 90s." To facilitate parent-teacher communication, another district ensured that special education teachers had in-room phones. A parent in one district reported receiving calls from her child's teacher at least three times per week.

Districts consistently reported that maintaining open lines of communication with parents was their primary strategy for preventing disputes from escalating, and districts encouraged mediation whenever possible. One district in which administrators could recall only one due process hearing in the last decade, encouraged parents who disagreed with their children's IEPs to enlist the help of advocates. As part of the IEP, the district provided parents with information on how to work through the process and how to access advocates.

Attending to the foreign language needs of parents also improved communications. One district said it conducted all evaluations in the student's native language and provided copies of parent notices in several languages.

2) Category III districts also supported parents' active **involvement in the IEP process**. For instance, the principal of one school estimated that "99.9 percent of parents attend IEP meetings." At another site, parents were reported to attend all IEP meetings and to be very involved in all educational decision making affecting their children. Category III districts' commitment to parent participation in the IEP process was further reflected by the fact that the special education director of one district regularly monitored rates of parent participation in the IEP process; two other districts provided schools with funds to use for accommodations and services that would allow parents to participate in IEP meetings, including child care services and transportation assistance. Translation services also were available in at least one of the districts.

3) Category III districts also offered ongoing educational opportunities for parents via **workshops** and **published materials**. One district reported holding an annual parents' rights workshop conducted by a private parent advocacy group; another district described workshops with topics as such as secondary transition and legal issues; and a third district described parent trainings on topics such as special education practices and policies. Most districts reported that workshops and conferences oriented toward parents of children with disabilities were well attended.

4) Finally, Category III sites made extensive use of **support and advocacy networks** for parents of children with disabilities such as special education parent or special needs advisory councils. For example, in one district with a council – a group for parents of students with disabilities – meetings were scheduled eight times a year. Participants received information on topics such as transition and legal issues. Several Category III districts also mentioned the important role played by parent advocates at IEP meetings. A parent advocate is the parent of a child with a disability who has gone through the IEP process and has been trained on how to support other parents whose children have IEPs.

Resources

Two types of resources were widely available across Category III sites: **workshops** and **printed materials**. Workshops for parents and school personnel tended to focus on the IEP process, due process and how to boost parent participation in IEP meetings. In one district, IEP workshops were offered to parents every year. Last year, 85 of the district's 420 parents with special needs students

attended. In another district, meetings of the Special Education PTA occurred monthly with opportunities for learning workshops.

Most of the districts provided parents with **written materials** in the form of handbooks and pamphlets, which offered information on parent rights and special education policies and practices. They also took steps to make **accommodations** that enabled parents to attend school meetings. Such accommodations included transportation for parents with disabilities and flexible scheduling for working parents. **Interpretation services** helped involve all parents by providing written materials in parents' native languages as well as by providing interpreters at IEP meetings.

Evaluation Tools

Four of the five Category III sites reported using evaluation tools to measure parent satisfaction and involvement. For instance, several sites required that teachers keep track of all parent contact via "phone logs," and two sites asked parents in a survey to rate the quality of special education services. Another district provided translations of surveys in parents' native languages.

Category III sites were the only districts that offered parents opportunities to provide more comprehensive feedback via shared decision making and membership on district-level committees. Such committees typically addressed important educational policy issues, including professional development, personnel hiring and curriculum.

Perspectives on Parent Participation

Teachers, administrators and parents at Category III sites uniformly agreed that school personnel actively encouraged parent involvement, that districts offered a wide range of opportunities for meaningful parent participation and that parents were both actively involved and well informed.

Parents generally said they felt teachers had done a good job of keeping them informed of their children's progress and allowing them opportunities to participate in important education decisions affecting their children.

- Most were well informed of their rights. In one district, parents were aggressively involved in their children's IEPs: half said they had hired outside professionals to ensure their children were receiving all the necessary services.

- Middle school parents in one district said they received 100 percent feedback from teachers and administrators and immediate responses to e-mails.

- *"The school has done a marvelous job,"* said a parent in another district.

- In two districts, parent responses were very positive to mailed surveys about special education.

Teachers and administrators said parents were fully engaged in their children's learning.

- *"We have positive interactions with parents,"* a principal said. *"Parents are right there, part of the decision making process. It's a real partnership."*

- Another administrator reported that parents *"always attend meetings, follow up with questions and have a high level of participation."*

- In one district, the special education director said 85 percent of parents were involved appropriately. She said the others were *"not involved enough"* or *"too involved."*

- Teachers and administrators typically believed that parents of special education students were more involved in their children's education than parents of students without disabilities.

Factors Influencing Implementation

Barriers to parent involvement, when reported, were relatively minor compared with those reported in Category I and II. Factors influencing implementation included strong state, district or school-level leadership; an existing district-level infrastructure; and adequate numbers of well-trained staff.

All Category III sites reported satisfaction with current efforts to include parents, as well as current levels of parent participation. One site mentioned a desire to increase participation of parents who have children with disabilities by offering more workshops, but no sites had formal goals to increase parent participation.

- **Minor Barriers:** Parents from some districts described wanting more bilingual teachers, or more information regarding summer activities for their children with disabilities. Others, when probed, occasionally reported a desire for more opportunities to contribute to educational program design or to meet more regularly with children's teachers. Administrators, on the other hand, tended to worry about parental "over-involvement."

- **Strong Leadership:** The majority of Category III sites reported the existence of strong state or district-level leadership. For instance, several sites reported that states provided guidance and direction in parent participation, and other sites noted the importance of district administrators or principals who consistently encouraged the active participation of parents in their children's education.

- **Existing Infrastructure:** Another recurring theme was the importance of an existing infrastructure at the district-level to enable more effective monitoring efforts such as tracking of parent/teacher contact or levels of parent participation in the IEP process.

- **Well-Trained and Available Staff:** Several Category III sites reported that high levels of parent involvement were due in part to adequate numbers of well-trained staff. This included district administrators with backgrounds in special education, as well as school psychologists and teachers who were not only skilled in working with parents, but also had sufficient time to meet with parents.

Chapter 5: Offering Curricular Access and Placement in the Least Restrictive Environment

Rationale for Linking Two Congressional Questions

In this chapter, we report on two congressional issues of interest – providing students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum and placing them in the least restrictive environment (LRE), particularly for minority students. Two reasons support this decision.

First, district administrators and school staff reported on these topics not as independent issues, but ather as interdependent issues. When educators develop a plan for meeting the individualized needs of students with disabilities, they are not likely to make decisions in isolation about how they can help students access the general education curriculum, or what placement should be made. Rather, we found that the respondents often link the two issues together.

Respondents would describe the range of placement options and each placement option appeared to have a relationship to the extent of the curricular access. For example, children with severe disabilities were sometimes placed in "side-by-side" classrooms. In this setting, students with disabilities were seated in classrooms with their nondisabled peers. Together they had morning openings, lunch, recess and music. Academics were offered separate and individualized for the student with a disability, who received instruction in a resource room setting in order to receive more intense and direct instruction to meet their individualized needs.

Respondents also indicated that the IEP team had the responsibility for making the curricular access and placement decisions. Educators and parents develop an IEP for meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities. To meet its charge, the IEP team determines the goals the student must meet to progress in the general education curriculum and also the appropriate placement and supports required for the student to meet the goals. Thus, the schools, and in particular, the IEP team within each school, set forth the educational plan for children with disabilities.

Although we interviewed principals, general education teachers and special education teachers, we purposely did not purposely interview the team leader for an IEP team or the staff person responsible for IEP development at the schools, in part because some of the teachers we interviewed served this IEP role. Nor was it the intent of this study to gather data focused so deeply on how the IEP team made decisions on the individual child and his/her educational program.

Second, all administrators reported that their districts offered a range of placement options, as required by the legislation since its original authorization in 1975. Some options were reported as used more often than others, such as resource rooms rather than residential placements. And in 16 of the 17 districts, administrators reported that the district offered the full range of options. In the remaining district, the majority of children with disabilities were served in the general education classroom. This district reported that only the most severely and multiply disabled children were served in a self-contained setting. So, only two options in practice could be reported for this district.

However, actual placement data at the district was not a component of the field data collection, and the responses to the survey question on placement reliably cannot be reported. For these reasons, we describe the range of placements (LRE) as a condition for understanding curricular access.

What the Legislation Requires

Original Legislation

The *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* of 1975 (PL 94-142) guaranteed children with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment. Prior to this time, students with disabilities could be denied an education for any number of reasons and by the early 1970s only one in five students with disabilities were educated in U.S. schools (OSEP, History of IDEA, http://www.ed.gov/offices/ OSERS /Policy/ IDEA25th/Lesson1_History.html). Many states even had laws that specifically excluded certain students, including children who were deaf, blind, emotionally disturbed, or mentally retarded.

PL 94-142 was grounded in the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution and was enacted into law after two landmark court decisions established the responsibility of states and localities to educate children with disabilities. It required students with disabilities to be educated with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate and prohibited the removal of students with disabilities from regular education environments *except* when the nature or severity of the disability was such that education in regular classes could not be achieved satisfactorily.

Because much of the emphasis of PL 94-142 was placed on educating children in the least restrictive environment, progress toward its implementation was measured by documenting the educational placement of students with disabilities. Not until reauthorization in 1997 was a greater emphasis shifted from placement to improved educational results.

What Reauthorization Requires

With the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997, the law maintained its commitment to educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. In addition, however, the law now required that students with disabilities be provided access to the general education *curriculum*. In the regulations finalized by the U.S. Department of Education in 1999, the general education curriculum is defined as "the same curriculum as for nondisabled children," (p. 98). Thus, students with disabilities continued to be educated alongside their nondisabled peers when appropriate, but they were also taught the same material and held to the same standards as their nondisabled peers whether or not they were being educated in the same setting.

Why IDEA Was Amended

The 1997 Amendments to IDEA are a reflection of the Federal commitment to providing a quality education to all children with disabilities. Whereas Public Law 94-142 guaranteed access to education for all children with disabilities, the Amendments articulate a new challenge to improve educational results for students with disabilities. The intent of the legislation was that providing access to the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment students with disabilities would have the best opportunity to reach their full potential.

Summary of the Types and Ranges of Implementation Tools Observed

Among the 17 districts a variety of policies, practices and resources were identified to support access to the general education curriculum by students with disabilities.

- **LRE Placement:** All 17 sites visited reported that some range of placement options was provided, although for one district the range was very restricted. The consistency with which districts had implemented the LRE provision varied. Districts reported little change in the number of students with disabilities placed in the respective placements, and there was no impact on minority students.

- **Policies:** The policy elements described by districts were: 1) a commitment to providing students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum, most often defined as teaching the general education content and using the same materials; 2) having the IEP team determine the modifications needed to make curricular access possible for individual students; 3) having the same expectations for academic achievement for students with and without disabilities; and 4) following the state content standards as the general curriculum.

- **Practices:** Districts described a range of practices reflecting their efforts to provide students with disabilities access to the general curriculum. Practices included the following: teaching students with and without disabilities the same content and using the same materials; providing instructional modifications as needed; encouraging and supporting collaboration among teachers in general education and special education; and improving the abilities of all teachers to address the individual needs of students.

- **Resources:** The resources used most frequently were professional development activities for administrators and teachers, and additional support staff such as instructional aides.

Distribution of Sites Across Implementation Categories

Among the 17 districts, three were categorized as Category I, nine as Category II and five as Category III. Category I districts generally had lower expectations for the academic achievement of students with disabilities and offered limited supports for curricular access. Districts in Category II reported inconsistent implementation of curricular access and offered few resources. Districts in Category III provided consistent implementation of curricular access, more supports for curricular access, and more consistent instructional modifications.

Category I

Characteristics of Category I Districts: Low Expectations and Few Policy Supports

- Students with disabilities are not expected to meet the academic standards of their nondisabled peers.
- Policies and practices do not encourage access to the general education curriculum.
- Individualized supports are not available to help students with disabilities succeed in the general education curriculum. Few instructional modifications are typically used.
- Resources to assist teachers in practices that support curricular access are generally limited.

Demographic, Geographic and Organizational Variation

All three districts reported an average number of students with IEPs (7 to 17 percent) and all expressed dissatisfaction with the level of support they received from their states. Although there were few other similarities across the three districts, the two from one state were similar to each other and quite different from the third. The third district is a medium-sized district in the West with students who are high in poverty (51 to 100 percent are eligible for free and reduced-fee school lunch), high in minority status (36 to 100 percent) and high (26 to 100 percent) in having a first language other than English. The other two districts were both small districts in the South with low or average ratings on levels of student poverty, minority status and non-English speaking.

LRE Placement

The three districts categorized as Category I in terms of curricular access reflected two quite different situations with regard to LRE. Two districts from the same state reported that they provided a continuum of services for students with disabilities but also described situations that appeared inappropriately restrictive. The third district described its approach to LRE as being a full-inclusion model with a restricted range of placements.

In the first two Category I districts, stakeholders reported that they provided a range of placement options for students with disabilities and that placement was based on student needs. These districts also reported that some resources were available to support LRE, namely professional development activities for teachers and some support staff. However, in these districts parents of students with disabilities reported on practices counter to the spirit of the LRE provision. Parents said that some parents of students with disabilities had been told by the district that their child had to be home schooled for an indefinite period of time since the school was unable to handle the student's needs. In another instance, students were sent home regularly for half of the school day, as a part of their education program. According to the parents, they were not given training in how to teach their children nor were the children provided with home tutors.

The third Category I district presented a very different picture with regard to LRE. This district abruptly and recently shifted from a longstanding policy of segregating students with disabilities to a self-described full-inclusion model in which all students with disabilities, except the most severely disabled were placed in general education classrooms. This change was made in response to a district-initiated state compliance review with IDEA 1997. According to the reports of teachers, placements were made across the board, not in response to the needs of individual students, and without providing essential training or support. The result was that this district lacked a continuum of placement options since 90 percent of the students with disabilities had the same placement. Despite the lack of supports reported by teachers, administrators in this district reported feeling satisfied that the changes made were in keeping with the LRE and curricular access provisions of the 1997 Amendments to IDEA.

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Policies, Practices and Resources

Districts in Category I either did not report clear policies guiding implementation of curricular access or had a clear policy that did not include individualizing the means for each student with disabilities to gain curricular access.

For example, one of the districts had shifted to a full-inclusion policy and the interpretation of the curricular access provision seemed to be to place all students in general education classrooms. This was done for all students with disabilities except the most severely disabled and reportedly without consideration of individual students' needs and without providing sufficient guidance or training for staff.

Also, in most of these districts, students with disabilities were not expected to meet the same academic standards as students without disabilities. For example, in one of the districts a teacher noted that academic goals were *perceived* as a three-tiered pyramid, and that students with disabilities were expected to learn only the information at the base of the pyramid while nondisabled students were expected to master the information at the second and third tiers. In another district stakeholders stated that participation in the general curriculum was linked with a lower standard for student performance and that expectations were often guided by what a student was willing to do.

The practices also were limited. Personnel in Category I districts reported that students with disabilities used the same instructional materials as the general education students. Respondents in two Category I districts reported using instructional modifications to enable students with disabilities to gain curricular access. The modifications described included shortening assignments, using cooperative groupings and changing the work location. However, a teacher in one of these districts reported that few instructional modifications were typically used.

The only available support resources were limited numbers of support staff to facilitate inclusive practices. In one district, a behavior intervention specialist provided support to teachers across the district as well as direct services to a class of students with behavioral disabilities.

Factors Influencing Implementation

Category I districts reported a number of barriers to implementation of curricular access.

- **Lack of policy supporting curricular access:** Two Category I districts located in the same state reported that their districts lacked policies supporting curricular access because the state had not yet formulated guidelines concerning this IDEA provision. In addition, principals in one of these districts said they received no encouragement from the district to include children with disabilities in the general education curriculum. One staff member said, "We're nowhere on this other than broadcasting it."

- **Interpretation of curricular access provision:** In the Category I district that had abruptly moved to what was called a full-inclusion model, providing curricular access seemed to be defined as placement in the general education classroom but without needed supports. While teachers complained that students with disabilities were not able to participate in the general curriculum despite the placement, a district administrator expressed satisfaction with the situation.

- **Lack of training and guidance:** Given that the curricular access provision is relatively new, it was likely that teachers would need additional training on effective means of helping students with disabilities gain curricular access. But stakeholders in all Category I districts described a lack of training and guidance as the primary barrier to curricular access. A number of administrators and teachers stated that they and others needed more training on how to teach the general education curriculum to students with disabilities, including how to modify instructional approaches and materials. However, one administrator reported that even when training activities were provided, few teachers attended. Administrators in one district reported they were actively seeking outside assistance in how to implement the curricular access provision. Parents in one district complained that teachers lacked the skills needed to address the behavior problems of both students with and without disabilities to allow them to be in the least restrictive environment and to access the general education curriculum.

- **Insufficient support staff:** Teachers across Category I districts stated their need for more instructional aides and other staff to help students with disabilities gain curricular access.

- **Impact on students:** District and school staff believed that students with disabilities could not benefit from accessing the general education curriculum.

Category II

Demographic, Geographic and Organizational Variation

Category II districts were too varied in demographic and organizational characteristics to permit general statements about shared characteristics with one exception. Two districts were located in states with historical, state-wide high-stakes testing. Administrators and teachers in these districts remarked on the extent to which including students with disabilities in state-wide assessments had strongly promoted students' gaining access to the general education curriculum. Several teachers commented that students with disabilities needed to learn the same material as other students if they were to take the same tests.

Characteristics of Category II Districts: Better Recognition of Need for Supports, but Teacher Training Still Lacking

- Formal or informal policies exist to support access to the general education curriculum.
- A range of practices and some instructional supports are available. Team teaching and team planning are among the practices used to boost the quality of instruction.
- Presence of support staff is more evident, including IEP coordinators and aides.
- The district and state provide training opportunities for teachers and staff, but the training is still considered inadequate.
- Administrators acknowledge that they are only in the beginning stages of implementing curricular access for students with disabilities and that more needs to be done.

LRE Placement

The nine districts categorized as Category II of curricular access all reported providing a continuum of LRE placement options for students with disabilities. Options ranged from a least restrictive all-day placement in a general education classroom to a most restrictive out-of-district placement in a residential treatment facility. Specific placements available varied across districts. Resources to support LRE were offered in most of the Category II districts.

Policies, Practices and Resources

Most Category II districts taught students with disabilities the same content and used the same materials as those used for students without disabilities. They also provided instructional modifications.

Five of the nine Category II districts described instructional modifications used to help assist students with disabilities access the general education curriculum. One teacher reported, "I cover the curriculum, the same chapters, but show more movies." Other teachers reported reducing emphasis on spelling, allowing more time to complete assignments, teaching more in small groups, and using more hands-on teaching techniques.

Three districts described changes in school organization and procedures to support general education access. These approaches included supporting team teaching and team planning among general and special education teachers and providing academic clubs, paid tutors and summer programs for students with disabilities who need them. Overall, there was more evidence of collaboration among teachers. Two Category II districts made efforts to encourage the collaboration. These districts reported including general education teachers on IEP teams, recruiting both types of teachers to serve on curriculum and planning committees, and providing the same professional development activities for all teachers.

Category II districts typically took advantage of training offered by the state and/or districts. Training activities were provided for both special and general education teachers and often focused on topics most relevant to providing curricular access, such as co-teaching, differentiated instruction, and teaching heterogeneous groups. Nevertheless, some teachers in Category II districts expressed a need for more training and said they were not always able to attend workshops due to a lack of substitute teachers.

Administrators in two districts pointed to the importance of support staff to encourage curricular access for students with disabilities. Support staff across Category II districts included an IEP coordinator who reduced some of teachers' paperwork load and classroom aides. One district reported having approximately one aide per nine students with disabilities, which allowed curricular access for even some students with severe disabilities.

A number of Category II districts described using state and grant funds for training and programs supporting curricular access. One district used state funds to improve the ability of both general and special education teachers to teach reading, which is especially relevant to curricular access since so many students with disabilities have weak reading skills. Programs providing direct support to students with disabilities included one that taught students with disabilities to "take charge of their learning differences" and another that provided mental health services in an elementary school. The mental health program was grant-funded and consisted of having two mental health counselors in the school full time to assist students (both with and without disabilities), teachers and parents with direct services as well as outside referrals. Two districts benefited from state-wide training on "using state content and performance standards for writing the IEP." And in one of these districts, the state provided follow-up training to the administrators and special education teachers in the district.

Factors Influencing Implementation

Most Category II districts reported some barriers to implementation of curricular access.

- **Historical state commitment:** Only two districts were in states with a historical commitment to special education reform or to high stakes testing.

- **Negative stakeholder attitudes:** Some stakeholders opposed having students with disabilities fully involved in the general education curriculum. The specific groups opposed to increased curricular access for students with disabilities varied across districts, but included both special and general education teachers, parents of students with disabilities, and a teachers' union in one district. The stakeholders resistant to change seemed satisfied with the use of self-contained classrooms and were anxious about what might be lost when students with disabilities are given access to the general education curriculum.

- **School level:** Teachers reported that modifying the general curriculum of high school classes for students with disabilities was much more difficult than in earlier grades, especially for students with severe cognitive deficits.

Category III

Demographic, Geographic and Organizational Variation

All five Category III districts were located in small, suburban, middle-class to upper-middle-class communities in the Northeast. The districts all had an average proportion of students with IEPs (7 to 17 percent) and a low proportion of students eligible for free and reduced-fee school lunch (up to 25 percent). Three districts had an average proportion of minority students (11 to 35 percent) and two sites had a low proportion (up to 10 percent). Four of the five Category III districts also had a low proportion of students whose first language was not English (up to 5 percent) while the fifth district had an average proportion (6 to 25 percent).

Characteristics of Category III Districts: Consistent Support for Students with Disabilities and Staff

- Expectations for students with disabilities are high. They receive the same instructional content as nondisabled students.
- Administrators and teachers have frequent access to professional development.
- Support personnel, such as instructional aides, are more available.
- Collaboration is common among special education and general education teachers.
- Organizational structures such as block scheduling provide additional supports to students with disabilities.

All the Category III districts were in states with state-wide, high-stakes testing. As with Category II districts in similar states, administrators and teachers in Category III districts repeatedly noted that including students with disabilities in the assessments had supported the argument for including them in the general curriculum. This was especially true of those districts in a state with a history of more than 100 years in state-wide testing.

Finally, the districts all were located in states with longstanding histories of education reform, although with different emphases relevant to the education of students with disabilities. One state has been a pioneer in the area of special education, specifically in terms of the least restrictive environment provision, while the other emphasized accountability for all students.

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LRE Placement

All districts in Category III of curricular access reported providing a continuum of LRE placement options for students, with IEP teams determining placements based on students' individual needs. Personnel in one Category III district said the district was committed to educating students in their home schools unless the students' academic and social needs could not be met there.

Stakeholders in Category III districts described several types of resources used to support LRE placements, including the following:

- Professional development activities for general education teachers on working with students with disabilities;
- Availability of instructional aides; and
- Implementing specific alternative programs to meet the needs of particular children in a district (e.g., class for young children diagnosed with pervasive developmental disorders and a small class with intensive behavioral and academic supports for students with behavior problems).

Policies, Practices and Resources

While most Category III districts did not describe explicit policy elements for curricular access, the consistent practices across schools revealed a clear set of expectations for students with disabilities. Across districts, stakeholders defined curricular access in terms of teaching the same content with the same materials with instructional modifications as determined by the IEP team, and expecting students with disabilities to achieve at the level of students without disabilities.

All the districts reported using multiple and varied practices to provide curricular access. For example, the districts provided students with disabilities instructional modifications and supports as needed. The school level influenced the type of instructional modifications used in some districts: high school students with disabilities often received extended time and extra instructional help; elementary school students received additional materials, reduced quantity of work and individualized instructional strategies. Other instructional modifications and supports included additional background information for challenging material and modified subject content. In some cases, students were allowed to tape homework responses instead of writing them.

Structures also were available to encourage productive collaboration. In one high school, for example, special education teachers met with general education teachers at the start of each school year to review the IEP goals of their shared students and to discuss the most effective teaching strategies. This initial meeting also served to start up ongoing weekly communication between the special education and general education teachers. General education teachers in another district also commented on referring to their students' IEPs for guidance. Other teachers described weekly planning meetings to discuss the needs of individual students with disabilities in their school. The meetings focused on the next week's curriculum and typically included all the staff working with a student, including general education teachers, special education teachers, teaching assistants, related service providers and sometimes parents.

Staff also described organizational structures in schools that supported curricular access. High school teachers in one district reported that the high school's block scheduling allowed students with disabilities to seek extra help and have extra time for assignments without calling attention to their special needs.

Two of the Category III districts reported that special education and general education teachers worked together to develop strategies for instructional and testing modifications, counseling and remedial work so that referrals to special education would not be needed.

Stakeholders in Category III districts described substantial resources to support curricular access, including training activities to improve teachers' skills to benefit students with and without disabilities. In one district, all teachers were encouraged to learn more about instructional techniques that would be especially useful in inclusion classrooms, such as providing differentiated instruction, using multi-sensory approaches and teaching heterogeneous groups. One goal of these training activities was for teachers to become more aware of the individual learning differences of all students, not just those classified as needing special education. Category III districts made efforts to encourage participation in district-sponsored training such as one district's offering teachers continuing education credit for a certain number of hours of after-school workshops.

Across Category III districts, support staff, especially instructional aides and school psychologists, were used to support curricular access. Category III districts reported using large numbers (over 70 aides reported in one district with 21 special education teachers) of instructional aides to allow curricular access even to students with moderate to severe disabilities. Another district used school psychologists as primary support staff for teachers working with students with disabilities. District staff reported that each school in the district had its own school psychologist who had typically worked in the school for many years and appeared to play a broad and vital support function. In addition to helping teachers develop strategies to address behavior problems, the psychologists often served as the link between teachers and the parents of students with disabilities.

Another resource used by some Category III districts was the use of specialized materials and instructional programs to support students with disabilities in the general curriculum. One district reported using an intensive computer-assisted reading program in classes for both general education and special education students. The reading program was originally intended for students in special education, but it was made available to all students with reading difficulties. Another district described using a specialized language curriculum to help students with disabilities learn to read.

Factors Influencing Implementation

The factors affecting implementation primarily reflected the need to improve curricular access and teacher supports.

- **Historical state commitment to high stakes testing:** Most of the districts are in states with a historical commitment to education reform and high stakes testing.

- **Supports for school staff in place:** Staff members are provided professional development, and teachers receive planning time and assistance from aides.

- **Need for more training:** Teachers in several Category III districts described a need for more training in how to work effectively with students with serious emotional and behavioral disabilities. Teachers also stated they wanted more guidance on the role of the special education teacher in an inclusion classroom.

- **School level:** Administrators and teachers commented on the difficulty of providing curricular access at the high school level. As in some Category II districts, teachers in Category III districts found it nearly impossible to modify high school curricula for students with severe cognitive deficits and/or limited reading skills. Another barrier specific to high school was the need for high school teachers to teach a range of high school subjects. In a district with these concerns, it was decided that high school special education teachers would not have to teach more than two related subjects.

Chapter 6: Including Children with Disabilities in Accountability Systems

What the Legislation Requires

Original Legislation

The 1997 Amendments to IDEA directed states, districts, and schools not only to provide services to children with disabilities but to also improve their performance—thus establishing challenging standards and high expectations for students with disabilities. Prior to the 1997 Amendments, IDEA did not directly address improving the performance of children with disabilities on general scholastic activities and assessment.

What Reauthorization Requires

The 1997 Amendments to IDEA include requirements that states establish goals for the academic performance of children with disabilities and develop indicators to judge children's progress. The goals and indicators must be consistent, to the maximum extent appropriate, with goals and standards for all children in the state. The state indicators must address the performance of children with disabilities on assessments. Every two years, states must report to the Department of Education and to the public on progress toward meeting the established goals.

The 1997 Amendments address for the first time the inclusion of children with disabilities in state, local, and school accountability measures that have been adopted for all students. Students with disabilities are to be included in general state and district-wide assessment programs with necessary accommodations. The final regulations clarified that, in developing each child's IEP, the IEP team in addition to considering the strengths of the child and the results of evaluations also must consider, as appropriate, the results of the child's performance on any general state or district-wide assessments. Students who cannot participate in general state or district-wide assessments may participate in alternate assessment, and states are to develop guidelines for these assessments. As a result of these policy mandates and practices, states, districts, and schools are to report on the participation and scholastic performance of students with disabilities.

Why It Changed

With the 1997 Amendments to IDEA, Congress made clear that the increased emphasis throughout public education on high academic standards and achievement must include students with disabilities. The Amendments view state-wide assessments as contributing to a student's educational opportunity. Given the emphasis on assessment in recent educational reform efforts, including state and federal legislative linking assessments and school accountability, it is considered important that students with disabilities be included in the development and implementation of assessment activities. Too often, children with disabilities have not participated in assessments only to be shortchanged by the low expectations and less challenging curriculum that may result from exclusion. Including students with

disabilities in state-wide assessments and requiring that their scores be reported separately are first steps in learning more about the scholastic performance of students with disabilities.

Summary of the Types and Ranges of Implementation Tools Observed

The following implementation tools were identified based on a review of the descriptions of implementation from all 17 districts.

- **Policies:** The core policy elements regarding participation of students with disabilities in assessments were, first and most importantly, that students with disabilities were expected to participate in the same assessments as students without disabilities. Additional policy elements supported providing assessment accommodations and alternative assessments as needed and reporting achievement scores of students with disabilities in disaggregated form even if they were also reported in aggregated form. While most districts did not describe formal policies concerning assessments, graduation, or attendance, the described practices revealed at least implicit policies on assessment.

- **Practices:** Specific practices paralleled the policy elements and included: full participation of students with disabilities in assessments, provision of accommodations, provision of alternative assessments and disaggregated reporting of scores.

- **Resources:** Resources, when described, most often consisted of training activities and availability of support staff.

Distribution of Sites Across Implementation Categories

Among the 17 districts, six were categorized as Category I, eight as Category II, and three as Category III. Categories differed most fundamentally in terms of the extent to which district policies expected that students with disabilities would take the same assessments as students without disabilities. Categories also differed in terms of availability of alternative assessments and extent of stakeholder support for full participation of students with disabilities.

Characteristics of Category I Districts: Schools have low expectations for students with disabilities; districts offer minimal direction or resources

- School staff do not report that students with disabilities benefit from inclusion in assessments.
- Districtwide policies are not evident.
- Although IEP teams make the decisions about whether students with disabilities will take assessments and decide on the types of accommodations, teachers said they lack sufficient information to make these judgments.
- Alternate assessments for students with severe disabilities were not offered.
- Resources such as technical assistance are generally not available to support teachers and IEP teams in developing criteria for determining the participation of students with disabilities in assessments.

Category I

Demographic, Geographic and Organizational Variation

The districts in Category I were similar in only a few district demographic characteristics. Four of the six had a low proportion of students with IEPs (up to 7 percent), four of the six were from the Midwest, and five of the six were low in the number of students with

limited English skills (up to 5 percent). No consistent similarities were found across districts for the following demographic characteristics: size, percentages of minority students and of students eligible for free and reduced-fee lunch.

Policies, Practices and Resources

District policies supported efforts by IEP teams and parents to determine whether students with disabilities would participate in the same assessments as nondisabled students, as well as the type of accommodations that would be offered to the students. Yet, teachers reported that the district provided insufficient direction to support them in making decisions on behalf of the students.

For example, in most of the Category I districts, decisions about whether students with disabilities would participate in assessments were made on an individual basis by the students' IEP teams and parents. Criteria for making these decisions varied. One district administrator stated that participation was recommended only if it seemed that the experience would be "functional and beneficial to the child" and "meaningful to the parents." In another district IEP teams reportedly made the decisions about assessments, but a stakeholder said that in fact it was usually the classroom teacher who decided.

Across Category I districts, consistent policies were not reported about providing alternative assessments or reporting test scores of students with disabilities, but implicit policies supported providing assessment accommodations. As a matter of practice, all districts in Category I reported providing a range of assessment accommodations to students with disabilities. Accommodations were described that addressed the following aspects of assessments: setting, timing/scheduling, presentation and response.

The districts did not report using alternative assessments for students with more severe disabilities. Four districts in one state reported they were still waiting for guidance from the state about the development of alternative assessment tools.

Category I districts reported test scores of students with disabilities in varied ways. Among the six districts, three reported special education students' scores only aggregated with the scores of general education students, two reported them only disaggregated and one district stated that scores were reported in both ways.

The state in which four Category I districts were located gave scholarship funds to students who performed especially well on state-wide tests. Some teachers commented that the scholarships might influence parents wary of assessments to instead encourage their children to take the tests.

Consistent with the minimal practices in Category I districts, no districts reported resources directed at supporting the participation of students with disabilities in state- or district-wide assessments. In one district additional funds and technical assistance were provided to schools whose students scored poorly on achievement tests, but did not provide the same resources if only the students with disabilities performed poorly.

Factors Influencing Implementation

Districts in Category I mentioned several barriers to implementing full participation of students with disabilities in assessments.

- **Impact on Students:** The most common barrier reported by administrators, teachers and parents in Category I districts was a negative attitude toward including students with disabilities in assessments. Teachers and parents said the schools, in general, did not hold high expectations for students with disabilities. School staff reported that their expectations were below those that they had for nondisabled students, and that they were often guided more by what the student was willing to do. Principals in one district reported that testing upset teachers and students because few students performed well on the assessments. In fact, some principals viewed participation in assessments as potentially emotionally damaging to students. One principal commented, "We don't make kids take it; it can be pretty devastating for students with severe emotional impairments." A teacher in another district said, "It's a self-esteem issue. It just knocks them down." Principals in other districts said that parents kept their children home on testing days. No student with a disability in one particular district had ever passed a district-wide achievement test.

- **Lack of Clear Policy:** Category I districts lacked clear policies asserting that students with disabilities would participate in assessments. Although these districts were in states with policies supporting full participation, districts seemed to have considerable leeway in whether the policies were implemented.

- **Lack of State Guidance on Alternative Assessments:** The four districts located in one state reported that they had not yet developed alternative assessment tools because of lack of guidance from the state on this issue. Teachers complained that the assessment tool had been under development by the state for over two years.

- **Lack of Resources:** Stakeholders across Category I districts commented on the lack of resources to support students' participation in testing. Teachers said that more support staff were needed to help provide assessment accommodations and they needed support in choosing among various accommodations available to students with disabilities.

Category II

Demographic, Geographic and Organizational Variation

Category II districts showed few similarities in demographics and organizational characteristics. Three of the eight districts were large and the remainder small. Three were in the West, four in the Northeast and one in the South. Four had low percentages of children with free and reduced lunch, two had high percentages and the remaining were about average. Three had low percentages of students with limited English proficiency, one had high

Characteristics of Category II Districts: Broader Support Available for Participation in Assessments

- Policies and resources are somewhat aligned for students with disabilities to participate in state- and districtwide assessments.
- Alternative assessments are sometimes available.
- Test scores of students with disabilities are not consistently disaggregated.
- Training available to teachers on providing test accommodations and alternative assessments.

percentages and the remainder of the districts was about average.

Policies, Practices and Resources

Most of the Category II districts reported policies requiring students with disabilities to participate in the same assessments as nondisabled peers. Policies supporting assessment accommodations were implicit.

All Category II districts reported requiring full participation of students with disabilities in assessments and providing a range of assessment accommodations. Category II districts reported inconsistent implementation, though, of alternative assessments since only four of the eight districts reported using alternative assessments with students with severe disabilities. In terms of reporting test scores, Category II districts varied as to whether or not scores of students with disabilities were reported separately or aggregated with the scores of students without disabilities. Some districts reported scores in both aggregated and disaggregated form and others in only aggregated form.

Most of the Category II districts reported providing resources to support participation in assessments. Training activities were the type of resource mentioned most frequently. Four districts reported providing training for teachers on either how to provide testing accommodations or how to develop alternate assessments for students with severe disabilities.

Two districts used additional support staff to aid participation in assessments. One district hired substitute teachers to help with testing accommodations in the classroom and another hired a full-time testing coordinator.

Factors Influencing Implementation

- **Alignment between Policy and Resources.** Districts made explicit their expectations for including students with disabilities in general and alternate assessment, including children with severe disabilities. Although possibly insufficient from a teaching perspective, the district did offer training for some staff.

- **Lack of Training.** Although more resources were allocated for training in Category II than Category I, teachers in several districts complained about the lack of guidance they had received on how to determine which students should be exempt from the standard assessments and given alternate assessments. Other teachers stated they needed more training on how to implement assessment accommodations since they found making modifications on teacher-developed tests too difficult and time consuming.

- **Impact on Students.** Some stakeholders across Category II districts questioned the benefit of participation in assessments because of the stress it causes for students with disabilities. They said some students with disabilities cry during the tests and are not able to finish them; others do not want to return to school after testing days.

Category III

Demographic, Geographic and Organizational Variation

Category III districts were highly similar in demographics. All were small, suburban districts in middle-class to upper-middle-class communities in the Northeast. The population of students they served had average percentages of IEPs (7 to 17 percent), low percentages of limited English speakers (up to 5 percent), and low percentages of students eligible for free and reduced-fee lunch (up to 25 percent). Two districts had an average percentage of minorities (11 to 35 percent) and one a low percentage (up to 5 percent).

Characteristics of Category III Districts: Comprehensiveness Across Policies, Practices, and Resources for Assessment of All Students with Disabilities

- All students with disabilities are required to participate in assessments.
- Alternative assessments are consistently available for students with severe disabilities.
- Assessment accommodations are widely available.
- Few barriers exist to prevent students with disabilities from taking tests.

In addition, Category III districts were located in two states that have a history of administering assessments to students. These states provided an existing infrastructure within which the accountability requirements for students with disabilities could be easily linked to education reform and its emphasis on accountability for all students.

Policies, Practices and Resources

While few of the districts in Category III described explicit policies regarding participation of students with disabilities in assessments, their consistent practices pointed to the presence of implicit policies supporting the following: full participation in assessment, provision of assessment accommodations, and using alternative assessment tools when the students' IEP teams determined a need for them.

All Category III districts included *all* students in state-wide and district-wide assessments. District administrators in one district stated that there was "no choice" given the state mandate and that 99 percent of students participated. All these districts also provided a wide range of testing accommodations as determined by a student's IEP team. Accommodations were provided with regard to setting, timing, presentation of test items and means of providing responses. One district reported scores of students with disabilities in both aggregated and disaggregated forms and the other two districts only reported the scores aggregated with the scores of students without disabilities.

All Category III districts provided alternative assessments, typically portfolio-based, to those students with disabilities too severe to permit participation in the standard tests even with accommodations. School staff received training on developing and administering portfolio-based assessments.

The only specific resource mentioned in a Category III district was a high school testing center in one district. The center was staffed by an aide who was able to provide the accommodations students with disabilities might need for any of sorts of tests, including standardized state and district tests, as well as curricular-based criterion-referenced tests.

Factors Influencing Implementation

Stakeholders in Category III districts described very few barriers to implementation of full participation in assessments overall. But a number of individual concerns were mentioned by district administrators and school staff across the three districts, and they included the following:

- **State Expectations:** Category III districts were locate in states that either had a 100-year long history of testing students or a long history of serving children with disabilities in general education settings.

- **Impact on School Staff and Students:** School staff and administrators questioned whether alternative assessments were actually worth the extensive amount of time and effort teachers put into them. They were also uncertain about the emotional impact on students with disabilities having to take tests they were almost sure to fail.

- **Need for More Training:** Although school staff had received more direction and training than districts in Category I and II, school staff still expressed a sense of frustration in needing more information about to implement assessment accommodations.

Chapter 7: Supporting Effective Transitions and Reducing Dropout Rates

Introduction

In this chapter, we summarize our findings on three areas of congressional interest: (1) helping children with disabilities make successful transitions from preschool to school, and (2) from secondary school to adult life; and (3) preventing students with disabilities, especially children with emotional disturbances and specific learning disabilities, from dropping out of school. Across the 17 districts, we report on the policies, resources, and practices districts use for implementation.

Our data revealed that districts either had routine procedures in place to address the above topics, or districts had few, if any, activities addressing the congressional issues. Due to limited time on site, we did not have sufficient opportunity to collect data from parents and school staff on this topic, and thus could not determine the comprehensiveness or consistency of the district use of implementation tools across stakeholders. Thus, we did not categorize the districts into implementation categories, and present descriptions across the 17 districts. In future data collection, we will pose questions to multiple stakeholders and explore if any additional activities have been implemented.

Transitions for Young Children

What the Legislation Requires

In 1986, Congress passed Public Law 99-457, amendments to the Education of the Handicapped Act mandating services for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. The law specifically assisted states in the development of a comprehensive, multidisciplinary and state-wide systems of early intervention services. Now referred to as Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), this mandate guides the provision of services for children from birth through age two. States serve preschool children under the "preschool grants" section 619 of Part B of IDEA.

IDEA reauthorization did not mandate a specific transition plan for movement from preschool services to kindergarten. It did, however, encourage family involvement in educational planning – which may include planning for transitions (LaParo, Pianta, and Cox, 2000).

Policies

Across the 17 districts, some reported following the federal guidelines for early childhood transition; others used informal or formal processes, rather than policies, to guide practice. For example, in one district, a formal process was in place for early childhood transition, but respondents called it slow, full of "red tape," and not necessarily driven by the child's needs. In another district the early childhood policies, along with a timeline for transition activities, were outlined in a parents' handbook that emphasized the district's commitment to student success and the value of parent collaboration with the district. Respondents in two other districts noted that the lack of policy limited the consistency and quality of transition from preschool to kindergarten.

Practices

In some districts early childhood transition practices consisted primarily of information delivery from the sending program or school to the receiving school. Usually this occurred in a meeting before or after the child made the transition.

In districts that offered more early transition services, the meetings were more frequent and more inclusive. A variety of staff from both sending and receiving programs planned for transition before it occurred. Programs and agencies represented at such meetings included preschools located outside the district, Head Start, district programs for preschoolers and infant-toddler programs. Personnel who sometimes attended the meetings included parents, early intervention specialists, preschool teachers, elementary teachers, administrators and related service providers. The meetings focused primarily on placement options and the individual needs of children in transition. Staff from receiving programs sometimes attended the IEP meetings of children about to make a transition, and staff from sending programs also attended the IEP meetings of children after they made the transition to a new program.

Program visits and classroom observations also helped inform the transition process in some districts. Kindergarten teachers in one district, for example, observed children in preschool programs, and parents visited the kindergarten classroom their child would attend.

Resources

Districts used multiple resources to assist with early childhood transitions. They hired personnel with transition expertise, developed leaders who had a commitment to effective transition, and built relationships with early childhood agencies and programs. Some districts, for example, reported building helpful relationships with infant-toddler programs and establishing longstanding relationship with state personnel responsible for the programs.

Evaluation Tools

Although districts did not report the use of evaluation tools, one planned to review transition outcomes to determine how best to serve preschoolers with behavior problems and their families.

Secondary Transition

What the Legislation Requires

Special attention to secondary transitions began in 1983 with amendments to Public Law 94-142. In addition to the 1983 amendments, which established services to facilitate school-to-work transitions through research and demonstration projects, further transition services were specified in amendments offered in 1990 to the renamed IDEA. This reauthorization mandated transition planning for 16-year-old students and assigned transition-planning tasks to the IEP team, including the requirement to invite the student to planning sessions.

The 1997 reauthorization addresses secondary transition in two areas: (1) changes in the IEP and placement process; and (2) emphasis on the age of majority.

(1) Changes in the IEP and placement process now emphasize new requirements for transition planning, as follows:

- Planning for transition services must begin at age 14 with a statement of transition service needs; and

- Transition for services must begin no later than age 16 (and younger, if determined appropriate), with students' IEPs to include services designed to facilitate their transition from school to the adult world.

As a result of the 1997 reauthorization, students' IEPs, beginning at age 14 and updated annually, must include a statement describing transition service needs in their courses of study. Service needs may include, for example, participation in advanced-placement courses or a vocational education program. The legislation provides an opportunity for the IEP Team to jointly plan how to make the high school experience directly relate to each student's dreams and goals for the future. When appropriate, transition needs written into the IEP may also include a statement of interagency responsibilities and any needed linkages.

(2) Emphasis on the age of majority means that students are now informed, at least one year before they reach the age of majority under state law, of any rights that will transfer to them upon reaching the age when they are considered adults. One year before the student reaches the age of majority under state law, the IEP must include a statement that the student has been informed of those rights.

Once students are no longer considered minors, schools must make a special effort to include them in the transition planning process. The 1997 amendments specify:

- If a purpose of the IEP meeting is the consideration of transition services, the school must invite the student to participate in the meeting; and

- If the student does not attend the IEP meeting where transition services are considered, the school must take other steps to ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered.

Policies

Some districts reported policies that matched federal mandates for transition guidance; others followed state policies and two districts described new IEP forms that guide secondary transition. In one state, where the district respondents said that state policies guided transition, educators considered the state policy more inclusive than federal policy: the state's regulations outlined which policy areas district officials should consider in transition planning, including instruction, community experience, employment and adult living. Districts in another state instituted a new IEP form to operationalize secondary transition elements of the legislation's reauthorization. The new IEP form was developed to focus policies on goals and resources. A vision statement appearing on the first page of the form helped to underscore the importance of transition services.

Practices

In some districts there was minimal transition-related activity. Efforts primarily consisted of meetings involving staff and parents to discuss students' transitions from high school. In other districts with more transition services, vocational education coursework was offered in addition to career exploration, skill and interest assessment, occupational training, job counseling, internship programs, community-based education, work-study and employment services.

In the state where the new IEP form was developed, the transition process was focused on student participation. The students helped develop the vision statement for the IEP based on their perception of where they would like to be at graduation and at age 22. The students were involved in determining their own course of study, including participation in a full range of transition services such as training, placement, counseling, adult living skills and small group support.

Resources

The districts that offered few transition services also had limited personnel dedicated to transitions. These included a vocational rehabilitation counselor available only half time, or access to state personnel who worked predominantly with older students who had severe disabilities.

In districts more dedicated to providing secondary transition, personnel with a variety of skills were employed. Such positions included school-to-work coordinators, vocational education staff, transition coordinators, job coaches, transition specialists and work-study coordinators. Outside agencies also provided expertise, including state rehabilitation agencies that offered counseling, job training and employment aligned with IEP goals. Other districts coordinated with educational service agencies (ESA) and community colleges to include students in occupational and vocational training programs.

Several districts offered staff development in secondary transitions, often through ESAs. Teachers attended workshops, for example, on integrating transition planning into the curriculum and developing career exploration projects.

Some districts offered parents training on secondary transition, while others gathered information from parents through a questionnaire about how parents view their children's future.

In the districts offering the most services, respondents said a number of outside agencies were involved in providing transition services to students, including state agencies for mental health, mental retardation and rehabilitation. Caseworkers from these agencies attended IEP meetings to participate in discussions about students' post-graduation needs. Respondents from one district, however, noted that the district was increasingly serving students from ages 19-22 because outside agencies didn't have the resources and because parents asked the district to continue to provide services.

Evaluation Tools

Districts did not report the use of tools for evaluating transition.

Dropout Prevention

What the Legislation Requires

The 1997 amendments require states to establish goals for the performance of students with disabilities, as well as indicators to measure progress toward those goals. At the very least, the indicators *must include* high school graduation rates, dropout rates and performance on assessments. (20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(16)).

The increasing emphasis on educational achievement and outcomes are driven by the recognition that such outcomes are necessary for successful transitions to either post-secondary school or the workplace. Indeed, research shows that students with disabilities who complete high school are more likely to be employed, enroll in postsecondary education and training, and earn higher wages (Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, & Newman, 1993). Unemployment rates for dropouts with disabilities are up to 40 percent higher than rates for high school graduates with disabilities (Marder & D'Amico, 1992). Thus, low dropout rates are one indication that states and districts are providing students with the necessary supports to achieve while in school and beyond.

Policies

Across the 17 districts, five had no formal dropout prevention policies in place. Respondents in some of these districts said they did not need to focus on dropouts because such education programs as vocational education, alternative placements and teacher-student counseling were enough to keep students in school.

Others implemented policies they believed would tangentially impact dropouts – such as attendance and suspension policies. One district, for example, implemented an attendance policy that required students to repeat a grade if they were absent more than 26 days in any single year. In another district, middle school administrators said their strict suspension policy served as a "wake-up call" for students at risk for dropping out.

Finally, two districts were taking the most aggressive stands on dropout prevention by adopting an individualized approach to dropouts, emphasizing high expectations for all students and creative problem solving involving teachers, students and parents. Educators in these districts reportedly made an exceptional effort to keep students in school.

Practices

Consistent with their policies, some districts had few or no dropout prevention activities in place, while others offered a wider range of practices. In K-6 elementary school districts, where few policies were in place, the practice of placing students in alternative settings was one of the only options available for students at risk. In contrast, other districts offered specific activities designed to reduce dropouts, including adjustment counselors, behavior plans, flexible and block scheduling, individual tutoring, vocational education, IEP adjustments, alternative placements and practices to encourage parent involvement.

Resources

The districts most commonly used alternative settings and specific school personnel to reduce dropout rates. The types of alternative settings available in these districts included psychiatric day and residential treatment programs, alternative high schools, self-contained classrooms and vocational schools. The personnel with specialized skills included counselors, special education coordinators and teachers. Districts did not cite outside social service agencies as a resource in dropout prevention.

Evaluation Tools

Districts used data systems to track graduation and dropout rates. These systems, however, did not disaggregate data for special education and general education students.

Chapter 8: Summary of Findings and Factors Influencing Implementation

This study provided us with an illustration of how districts address implementation of the issues identified by Congress in the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA. The findings are based on field visits to 17 districts. Data collection within each district included interviews with district and school personnel; a focus group with principals and parents;[14] and a review of district records and materials.

In this chapter, we summarize our findings, and present them below as "Findings at a Glance." In particular, we report on the policies and resources used by districts to establish or enhance a practice. We also discuss the factors associated with district implementation and thus, begin to explore the similarities on implementation across the congressional questions. Note that districts are classified into categories depending on how they are making progress toward outcomes identified in the congressional issues. A district can be classified into several categories, depending on the issue. In future years of data collection, we will continue to explore these complex factors associated with implementation, and potentially reveal additional factors contributing to implementation.

Findings at a Glance

Behavior

- Problem behaviors among students with and without disabilities have increased in the last five years in both frequency and intensity.

- A growing number of children with disabilities, who also have significant behavioral issues, come to school with multiple diagnoses. Nevertheless, administrators believe that children with disabilities and without disabilities are equally likely to exhibit problem behaviors.

Category I

- Most of the Category I districts took a reactive approach to behavior management that emphasized disciplinary procedures specified by IDEA. They generally did not rely on positive behavioral supports to address behavior problems.

- Category I districts did not use, or they misunderstood, functional behavioral assessments. Also, few resources were available to support behavior management. Staffing, training and information for parents were limited.

Category II

- A wider range of practices supporting behavior management and prevention were available at the Category II level than Category I, particularly in the efforts to create positive school environments as a means of reducing problem behaviors. But like Category I districts, Category II districts tended to respond punitively to behavior

[14] In one district, there was no focus group with parents.

infractions, and rarely did Category II districts mention the use of positive behavioral supports (PBS) as a tool for preventing or responding to inappropriate behaviors.

- Training opportunities were available in Category II schools for staff to support behavior management programs, conducting functional behavior assessments (FBA) and writing individualized education plan (IEP) behavioral goals and objectives.

Category III

- All Category III districts described a comprehensive range of formal policies governing the prevention and management of behavior problems. These included codes of conduct and safety plans; handbooks on discipline for students with disabilities; and guidelines for conducting FBA, developing behavior interventions, making referrals, and developing behavioral IEP goals.

- Two types of activities were consistently available in Category III districts: PBS, including character development programs and FBA; and behavioral IEP goals.

- Multiple resources were available in Category III schools, including opportunities for staff training and collaboration, adequate numbers of support staff and printed materials on behavior management.

Parent Participation

- A wide range of practices was used to improve parent participation. For all parents, these included parent/school communication, volunteer projects, school functions, workshops and opportunities to contribute to school and district-wide decision making. Practices targeting parents of students with disabilities included parent/school communication, involvement in the IEP process, workshops, support networks, and the opportunity to participate in parent advisory committees.

Category I

- The majority of Category I districts had no formal policies to encourage parent participation.

- Category I teachers reported regular efforts to keep parents of students with and without disabilities informed about their children's educational progress. These districts, however, offered few opportunities for higher-level participation in such activities as workshops or district-level decision making. And both sets of parents observed that the district had done little to reach out specifically to them.

- Resources to support parent participation in Category I districts were minimal or nonexistent, as were evaluation tools to gauge parent satisfaction and participation.

Category II

- Most Category II districts informally noted that they had stated goals to increase parent participation, and some added that their policies did not make distinctions between parents of children with or without disabilities.

- Category II districts offered many opportunities for communication about children's educational progress. Often these opportunities were interactive, inviting feedback from parents.

- The role of Category II parents in the IEP process, however, was inconsistent. Some saw the IEP for the first time at the meeting; others met several times to discuss the IEP before the meeting.

- The two most widely used resources in Category II districts were workshops on educational issues and printed materials such as handbooks and pamphlets providing guidance to parents of children with disabilities. Evaluations were achieved mainly through parent satisfaction surveys and communication logs to monitor parent contact.

Category III

- Policies in Category III districts were more aggressive, taking steps to actively engage parents.

- In Category III districts, parents of students with and without disabilities were highly engaged in back-and-forth communications with teachers about their children's schooling. Both groups of parents also took advantage of educational workshops and had opportunities to participate in shared decision making at the district and school level.

- For parents of students with disabilities, Category III districts supported their active involvement in the IEP process and in workshops. The districts also introduced these parents to support and advocacy networks.

Curricular Access and LRE Placement

Category I

- Category I districts offered either a continuum of services with placements that were generally very restrictive, or full inclusion with a restrictive range of placements.

- Districts in Category I either did not report clear policies guiding implementation of curricular access, or had a clear policy that did not include individualizing the means for each student with disabilities to gain curricular access. In most of these districts, students with disabilities were not expected to meet the same academic standards as students without disabilities.

- Category I districts reported that students with disabilities used the same instructional materials as the general education students. Modifications were available but typically were not used.

Category II

- All Category II districts offered a continuum of LRE placement options for students with disabilities.

- Most Category II districts taught students with disabilities the same content and used the same materials as students without disabilities. They also provided instructional modifications.

- Category II districts typically took advantage of training offered by the state and/or districts. Training activities were provided for both special and general education teachers and often focused on topics most relevant to providing curricular access, such as co-teaching, differentiated instruction, and teaching heterogeneous groups.

Category III

- All Category III districts reported providing a continuum of LRE placement options for students, with IEP teams determining placements based on students' individual needs. The district were committed to educating students in their home schools unless the students' academic and social needs could not be met there.

- Category III districts taught the same content with the same materials and provided instructional supports and modifications as determined by the IEP team. Students with disabilities were expected to achieve at the level of students without disabilities. All these districts reported using multiple and varied practices to provide curricular access.

- Support staff, especially instructional aides and school psychologists, were used to support curricular access in Category III districts.

Assessment

Category I

- All districts in Category I reported providing a range of assessment accommodations to students with disabilities, including accommodations for setting, timing/scheduling, presentation and response. But the districts did not report using alternative assessments for students with more severe disabilities.

- Some Category I districts aggregated the scores of students with disabilities and some disaggregated the scores.

Category II

- All Category II districts reported requiring full participation of students with disabilities in assessments and providing a range of assessment accommodations, but alternative assessments were inconsistently implemented.

- Most of the Category II districts reported providing resources to support participation in assessments, including training and extra support staff.

Category III

- All Category III districts included all students in state-wide and district-wide assessments. The districts also provided a wide range of testing accommodations as determined by a student's IEP team, including accommodations for setting, timing,

presentation of test items and a means of providing responses. For students with severe disabilities, alternative assessments were available.

- The only specific resource mentioned in Category III districts was a high school testing center in one district. The center was staffed by an aide who was able to provide accommodations to students with disabilities who might need assistance with assessments.

Transitions for Young Children

- Across the 17 districts, some reported following the federal guidelines for early childhood transition; others used informal or formal processes, rather than policies, to guide practice.

- In some districts early childhood transition practices consisted primarily of information delivery from the sending program or school to the receiving school in a single meeting before or after the transition.

- In districts that offered more early transition services, meetings were more frequent and more inclusive. A variety of staff from both sending and receiving programs planned for transition before it occurred.

- Districts supported transitions with hired experts and developed leaders and relationships with early childhood agencies and programs.

Secondary Transitions

- Some districts reported compliance with the federal mandate for transition guidance; others cited state policy guidance and two districts described new IEP forms that guide secondary transition. In some districts following state guidance, the districts reported these policies were more comprehensive than the federal mandates.

- In districts with minimal transition-related activity, efforts primarily consisted of meetings involving staff and parents to discuss students' transitions to high school. In districts with more transition services, vocational education coursework was offered in addition to career exploration, skill and interest assessment, occupational training, job counseling internship programs, community-based education, work-study and employment services.

- Resources were limited in the districts with minimal transition-related activity. In districts with more comprehensive services, resources included school-to-work coordinators, vocational education staff, transition coordinators, job coaches, transition specialists and work-study coordinators. Assistance also was available in these districts from outside agencies and an education service agency.

Dropout Prevention

- Across the 17 districts, five had no dropout prevention policies in place. Respondents in some of these districts said they did not need to focus on dropouts because such education programs as vocational education, alternative placements and teacher-student counseling were enough to keep students in school.

- The two districts with the most aggressive dropout policies adopted an individualized approach to dropouts, emphasizing high expectations for all students and creative problem solving involving teachers, students and parents.

- Districts with the most comprehensive dropout practices used adjustment counselors, behavior plans, flexible and block scheduling, individual tutoring, vocational education, IEP adjustments, alternative placements and practices to encourage parent involvement.

- Most districts had tracking systems in place to monitor dropout rates, and all but three disaggregated the data for special needs students.

Factors Influencing the Progress of District Implementation

In this section, we report on similarities among districts within each implementation category. Overall, similarities were most apparent on socioeconomic and demographic factors for Category I and Category III districts. We found fewer similarities in contextual factors among Category II districts. Other factors may link those districts, or the districts may be in Category II for different reasons and may not share many underlying characteristics. Also, we may observe some shift in implementation over time among our study districts.

Exhibit 8.1 displays how the districts in the three classification groups are distributed across congressional questions.[15] Each district is assigned a distinct letter and number, with the letter designating the state and the number a district in that state. Reading down the columns will show how frequently the same districts appear as Category I, II, or III. Some districts regularly were classified in the same categories across many or all of the congressional questions, while others were not.

Exhibits 8.2 through 8.4 display how the districts are distributed across selected contextual factors – including demographic factors and state influence – for each congressional question. A separate table is presented for each of the three categories of districts. Reading down the columns will show how frequently districts in a certain category showed similar demographic traits. For example, all Category III districts had low numbers of students receiving free and reduced lunches across all the congressional questions, and all but one Category III districts were small.

[15] Of the nine congressional questions, six of them were studied for policy alignment, and thus are represented in Exhibit 8.1.

Exhibit 8.1

Distribution of Districts across Implementation Categories for Congressional Questions

Congressional Question: How well are districts making progress toward…	**Category I**					**Category II**					**Category III**				
(1) Improving the performance of children with disabilities in general scholastic activities and assessments?	A1[16]	B3			E1 E2 E3 E4	A2	B1 B2 B4	C1 C3	D1 D2				C2	D3 D4	
(2) Providing for the participation of children with disabilities in the general curriculum, and (3) increasing the placement of children with disabilities, including minority children, in the least restrictive environment?	A1 A2	B2					B1 B3 B4	C1	D2	E1 E2 E3 E4			C2 C3	D1 D3 D4	
(4) Reducing the number of disagreements between education personnel and parents, and (5) increasing the participation of parents in the education of their children with disabilities?	A1 A2	B1 B2	C1		E3		B3 B4		D1 D2	E1 E4			C2 C3	D3 D4	E2
(6) Increasing the use of effective strategies for addressing behavioral problems of children with disabilities?	A1	B2		D2		A2	B1 B3 B4	C1 C2	D1	E1 E2 E3 E4			C3	D3 D4	

[16] Letters represent the states in the study. Numbers represent the districts in the study. The following number of districts were visited in each state: State A – 2 districts; B – 4 districts; C – 3 districts; D – 4 districts; and E – 4 districts.

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Exhibit 8.2
Contextual Profile of Category I Districts

Congressional Question: How well are districts making progress toward…	**Number of Category I Districts**	**Minority Students**[17]			**Poverty**[18]			**Size**[19]			**Percent IEP**[20]			**Percent SED**[21,22]			**State Involvement**[23]		
		L	M	H	L	M	H	S	M	L	L	M	H	L	M	H	L	M	H
(1) Improving the performance of children with disabilities in general scholastic activities and assessments?	6	E1[24] E2 E4	A1	B3 E3	E2	A1 E1 E4	B3 E3	A1 E1 E2 E3 E4	B3		E1 E2 E3 E4	A1 B3			B3 E4	A1 E1 E2 E3	A E		B C D
(2) Providing for the participation of children with disabilities in the general curriculum, and (3) increasing the placement of children with disabilities, including minority children, in the least restrictive environment?	3		A1 A2	B2		A1 A2	B2	A1 A2	B2			A1 A2 B2		B2	A2	A1	A E	B	C D
(4) Reducing the number of disagreements between education personnel and parents, and (5) increasing the participation of parents in the education of their children with disabilities?	6		A1 A2 B1	B2 C1 E3		A1 A2 B1	B2 C1 E3	A1 A2 B1 E3	B2	C1	E3	A1 A2 B1 B2	C1	B1 B2	A2	A1 C1 E3			
(6) Increasing the use of effective strategies for addressing behavioral problems of children with disabilities?	3		A1 D2	B2	D2	A1	B2	A1 D2	B2			A1 B2	D2	B2		A1 D2			

[17] Low (0-10%), Medium (11-35%), and High (26-100%). Source: Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.
[18] Low (1-25%), Medium (11-35%), and High (36-100%). Source: SLIIDEA District Survey Question A6a and Orshanksy Poverty Index.
[19] Small (0-10,000), Medium (10,000-40,000), and Large (40,000-up). Source: Common Core of Data, U.S. Department of Education.
[20] Low (0-7%), Medium (7-17%), and High (17%-up). Source: SLIIDEA District Survey Question A9.
[21] SED= Seriously emotionally disturbed; Low (0-.5%), Medium (.5-1%), and High (1%-up). Source: Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.
[22] Data not available for D1.
[23] Based upon interviews with state directors, senior analysts made judgments of the extent of the state's influence. When cells are empty, senior analysts had insufficient information to make a judgment.
[24] Letters represent the states in the study. Numbers represent the districts in the study. The following number of districts were visited in each state: State A – 2 districts; B – 4 districts; C – 3 districts; D – 4 districts; and E – 4 districts.

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Exhibit 8.3

Contextual Profile of Category II Districts

Congressional Question: How well are districts making progress toward…	**Number of Category II Districts**	**Minority Students**[25]			**Poverty**[26]			**Size**[27]			**Percent IEP**[28]			**Percent SED**[29,30]			**State Improvement**[31]		
		L	M	H	L	M	H	S	M	L	L	M	H	L	M	H	L	M	H
(1) Improving the performance of children with disabilities in general scholastic activities and assessments?	8	D1[32]	A2 B1 B4 C3 D2	B2 C1	B4 C3 D1 D2	A2 B1	B2 C1	A2 B1 C3 D1 D2	B2 B4	C1		A2 B1 B2 B4 C3 D1	C1 D2	B1 B2 C3	B4 C2	C1 D2	A E		B C D
(2) Providing for the participation of children with disabilities in the general curriculum, and (3) increasing the placement of children with disabilities, including minority children, in the least restrictive environment?	9	E1 E2 E4	B1 B4 D2	B3 C1 E3	B4 D2 E2	B1 E1 E4	B3 E3 C1	B1 D2 E1 E2 E3 E4	B3 B4	C1	E1 E2 E3 E4	B1 B3 B4	C1 D2	B1	B3 B4 E4	D2 E1 E2 E3	A E	B	C D
(4) Reducing the number of disagreements between education personnel and parents, and (5) increasing the participation of parents in the education of their children with disabilities?	6	D1 E1 E4	B4 D2	B3	B4 D1 D2	E1 E4	B3	D1 D2 E1 E4	B3 B4		E1 E4	B3 B4 D1	D2		B3 B4 E4	D2 E1			
(6) Increasing the use of effective strategies for addressing behavioral problems of children with disabilities?	11	C2 D1 E1 E2 E4	A2 B1 B4	B3 C1 E3	B4 C2 D1 E2	A2B 1 E1 E4	B3 C1 E3	A2 B1 C2 D1 E1 E2 E3 E4	B3 B4	C1	E1 E2 E3 E4	A2 B1 B3 B4 C2 D1	C1	B1	A2 B3 B4 C2 E4	C1 D2 E1 E2 E3			

[25] Low (0-10%), Medium (11-35%), and High (26-100%). Source: Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.

[26] Low (1-25%), Medium (11-35%), and High (36-100%). Source: SLIIDEA District Survey Question A6a and Orshanksy Poverty Index.

[27] Small (0-10,000), Medium (10,000-40,000), and Large (40,000-up). Source: Common Core of Data, U.S. Department of Education.

[28] Low (0-7%), Medium (7-17%), and High (17%-up). Source: SLIIDEA District Survey Question A9.

[29] SED= Seriously emotionally disturbed; Low (0-.5%), Medium (.5-1%), and High (1%-up). Source: Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.

[30] Data not available for D1.

[31] Based upon interviews with state directors, senior analysts made judgments of the extent of the state's influence. When cells are empty, senior analysts had insufficient information to make a judgment.

[32] Letters represent the states in the study. Numbers represent the districts in the study. The following number of districts were visited in each state: State A – 2 districts; B – 4 districts; C – 3 districts; D – 4 districts; and E – 4 districts.

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Exhibit 8.4

Contextual Profile of Category III Districts

Congressional Question How well are districts making progress toward…	Number of Category III Districts	Minority Students[33]			Poverty[34]			Size[35]			Percent IEP[36]			Percent SED[37,38]			State Improvement[39]		
		L	M	H	L	M	H	S	M	L	L	M	H	L	M	H	L	M	H
(1) Improving the performance of children with disabilities in general scholastic activities and assessments?	3	C2[40]	D3 D4		C2 D3 D4			C2 D3 D4				C2 D3 D4		D4	C2	D3	A E		B C D
(2) Providing for the participation of children with disabilities in the general curriculum, and (3) increasing the placement of children with disabilities, including minority children, in the least restrictive environment?	5	C2 D1	C3 D3 D4		C2 C3 D1 D3 D4			C2 C3 D1 D3 D4				C2 C3 D1 D3 D4		C3 D4	C2	D3	A E	B	C D
(4) Reducing the number of disagreements between education personnel and parents, and (5) increasing the participation of parents in the education of their children with disabilities?	5	C2 E2	C3 D3 D4		C2 C3 D3 D4 E2			C2 C3 D3 D4 E2			E2	C2 C3 D3 D4		C3 D4	C2	D3 E2			
(6) Increasing the use of effective strategies for addressing behavioral problems of children with disabilities?	3		C3 D3 D4		C3 D3 D4			C3 D3 D4				C3 D3 D4		C3 D4		D3			

[33] Low (0-10%), Medium (11-35%), and High (26-100%). Source: Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.

[34] Low (1-25%), Medium (11-35%), and High (36-100%). Source: SLIIDEA District Survey Question A6a and Orshanksy Poverty Index.

[35] Small (0-10,000), Medium (10,000-40,000), and Large (40,000-up). Source: Common Core of Data, U.S. Department of Education.

[36] Low (0-7%), Medium (7-17%), and High (17%-up). Source: SLIIDEA District Survey Question A9.

[37] SED = Seriously emotionally disturbed; Low (0-.5%), Medium (.5-1%), and High (1%-up).

[38] Data not available for D1.

[39] Based upon interviews with state directors, senior analysts made judgments of the extent of the state's influence. When cells are empty, senior analysts had insufficient information to make a judgment.

[40] Letters represent the states in the study. Numbers represent the districts in the study. The following number of districts were visited in each state: State A – 2 districts; B – 4 districts; C – 3 districts; D – 4 districts; and E – 4 districts.

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Category I Districts

Category I implementation was characterized by procedurally oriented policies, a significant gap between policy and practice, and a virtual absence of district or school-wide activities that could be considered proactive. For example, on the issue of behavior, responses to problems usually were reactive or punitive rather than preventive. Teachers often focused on discipline instead of using functional behavior assessments, character development programs or behavioral IEP goals. Any guidance from the district to schools was fragmented and viewed by principals and teachers as insufficient for responding to legislative requirements.

Similarly, on the issue of parental involvement, activities targeting parent involvement tended to be traditional, treating parents as passive recipients of services and information rather than as active contributors to the educational process. Districts typically engaged parents through traditional social functions including PTA meetings, holiday parties and opportunities to volunteer in the classroom. Communication often occurred through formal parent-teacher conferences, as opposed to two-way engagement, phone calls, workshops or solicitations for parental input.

Resources to support parent participation were minimal or nonexistent. Teachers, especially general education teachers, complained that they had little training on how to engage parents of children with disabilities. Similarly, on the issue of behavior, teachers lacked training in the use of positive behavioral supports and on the development of behavioral IEP goals. Opportunities for professional development were often limited or nonexistent and numbers of support staff were usually insufficient.

Districts often complained about weak policy guidance from the state. On the issue of behavior, for example, stakeholders agreed that resources for policy guidance and for funding professional development were simply not available at the state or district level. Stakeholders in a Category I district complained that the "state legislature has to be begged for everything." Perhaps the absence of local expertise exacerbated the problem of weak policy guidance from the state, making it difficult for the districts to overcome the lack of clarity on policy.

Similar examples of the state's impact on districts were evident on the issue of assessments. Category I districts complained that they lacked clear policies asserting that students with disabilities would participate in assessments. Although these districts were in states with policies supporting full participation, districts seemed to have considerable leeway in whether the policies were implemented.

And finally, in four other districts located in one state, stakeholders blamed state policymakers for not providing guidance to districts on the use of alternative assessments. Teachers in the districts complained that the state had been developing an alternative assessment tool for several years, but had not yet completed it.

Minority Students and Poverty

Two of the demographic similarities evident in the Category I districts were race and poverty. In the districts that most often were classified Category I across the areas of study, medium to high percentages of students were minorities. Similarly, medium to high percentages of students also received free and reduced lunches.

Serving high percentages of students who are minorities and living in poverty may place demands on districts. As noted below, just as Category III districts were able to focus on instructional goals

without the distractions of coping with students who had outside pressures, Category I districts had less time to focus on instructional goals. Students living in poverty come to school with more educational, social and emotional needs. They may present more challenges to districts because they come from homes where one or both parents are not present, or they may be distracted from learning because they come to school hungry. Also, reaching out to parents of these students presents additional challenges to districts because the parents are working, intimidated by educators, or in the worst case, are uninterested in their children's educational progress.

State Support

Category I district administrators reported general dissatisfaction with state support across all the areas of study. In the area of access, all the Category I districts indicated dissatisfaction with state support; four of the six districts indicated dissatisfaction on state support for parent participation issues; and two of three districts indicated dissatisfaction with support with behavior issues. It was apparent that these districts were waiting for direction from the state, and their schools were waiting for direction from them.

Category III Districts

Category III districts exhibited more comprehensive alignment across their articulation of policies, the allocation of resources to support the policies, and development and implementation of practices. Implementation was characterized by policies that went well beyond procedural requirements of the legislation. The significant gaps between policy and practice noted in Category I districts were absent in Category III districts. Policies were proactive rather than reactive. They tended to be district-wide rather than fragmented and applied on a school-by-school basis. Also, opportunities for developing staff expertise were ever-present; technical knowledge and expertise were apparent.

On the issue of behavior, for example, all Category III districts reported using character development programs to cultivate positive school environments. Unlike districts with fragmented approaches to policy implementation, all Category III districts reported long-term policies supporting positive behavioral supports, non-aversive responses to problem behaviors and systematic use of functional behavior assessments to prevent more serious behavior problems.

Resources for support personnel and professional development opportunities were available in all these districts. As a result, administrators and teachers reported familiarity with the proactive behavior strategies and teachers were satisfied with the support they received in behavior management and prevention.

On the issue of parent participation, these districts offered a wide range of resources that went beyond the traditional PTA meeting. They included parent workshops focusing on educational issues. Communications to parents were more comprehensive and often two-way. All the Category III districts conducted annual surveys of parent satisfaction or monitored levels of parent participation. These districts also were somewhat more likely to encourage mediation as a way of handling dispute resolution.

As noted below, many of the Category III districts with a comprehensive alignment across implementation tools felt supported by their states. Most were located in states that had a history of

reform activity and were considered leaders in the area of assessment or curricular access for students with disabilities, as reported by the stakeholders.

Poverty

All the districts classified as Category III on behavior, parent participation, access to the general education curriculum and assessment had few students living in poverty.

It is likely that higher income students in these districts had fewer social challenges than students living in poverty and therefore they presented fewer behavior problems to schools. Because these students were living in family environments where proper health care, nutrition and other basic needs were not constant concerns, they may have been less likely to come to school with challenging behavior issues. Therefore, the Category III districts that were consistent about applying behavior preventions, may have been the ones that had the most time to concentrate on providing these services because they were least challenged on a day-to-day basis.

The wealthier Category III districts may have had better access to resources that allowed them to be more consistent about applying policy tools that benefited students with disabilities. Their property tax base was higher, so these districts could afford to offer better salaries and professional development activities for teachers and staff. Better-trained staff had access to newer methods and more time to keep up with research. As a consequence, there was more evidence in these districts of all the things that allow them to offer a coherent approach to policy implementation.

In addition, parent participation in Category III districts could have been influenced by parents' income levels. Parents from higher income brackets, for example, typically either have more time to be involved in their children's schooling or have had better lifelong experiences with schools and therefore are more motivated and better equipped to play a role in their children's education. The converse is that low-income parents either have less time to be involved in their children's schooling or have been more intimidated by schools – sometimes because they did not receive the same attention and respect from school officials as higher-income parents.

Size

All of the districts classified as Category III on the issues of access, parent participation, assessment and behavior were small, each with fewer than 10,000 students. It is possible that these districts were more consistently using implementation tools benefiting students with disabilities because their attention was less fragmented. Perhaps these districts could attend more effectively to use of a comprehensive set of implementation tools because they were less overwhelmed than districts serving large numbers of students.

The data also suggest that their small size gave these districts the ability to individualize services. With time to familiarize themselves with student needs, district educators might have had more incentive to use the full range of implementation tools available to them.

Suburban

Although all but two of the districts in the study sample were classified suburban rather than urban, it might nevertheless be noteworthy that in virtually every area of interest, all the Category III schools were suburban. The only exception was an urban district that was classified as Category III on parent participation.

Role of the State

In each of the areas of interest, most of the Category III districts were in the Northeast. Specifically, every district classified as Category III in assessment, access and behavior was in the Northeast and four of the five districts in parent participation were in the Northeast.

The pattern could suggest that states with historic commitments to implementation efforts for educating students with disabilities have had an important influence on the comprehensiveness of district policies, practices and resources. For example, three of the five districts classified as Category III on curricular access issues were in one state and the remaining two were in another state. One of the states first passed legislation concerning the education of students with disabilities in 1972 and that law served as a model for the federal EHA passed in 1975. Since the 1970s, then, this state has required districts to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, which was often a general education classroom. In 1993 the state went further and emphasized that special education must be consistent with curriculum frameworks and that children with disabilities would continue to be integrated into the general education curriculum.

The other state does not have a long history of special education reform, but its longtime commitment to high-stakes state-wide testing seems to have had an impact on more recent state education reforms on access issues. The state has administered state-wide tests for over 100 years, and since 1977 students have been required to take the state-wide tests as a condition for high school graduation. So, the state has had a culture that accepts high-stakes testing as an expected and serious part of the school experience.

In 1996 the state passed sweeping educational reform legislation that called for the participation of students with disabilities in the same assessments as their nondisabled peers. The reform also said students with disabilities must have access to the general education curriculum. According to many respondents interviewed in the state, requiring students with disabilities to take the state-wide assessments has been the most significant influence on students' gaining access to the general education curriculum.

Summary

In sum, Category I districts registered less satisfaction than Category III districts with the state's leadership and support on issues relating to serving students with di. :bilities. It is likely that the districts' own weaknesses made them more dependent on state support than Category III districts, which were able to rely on their own internal resources and therefore were less dependent on state guidance.

Also, these districts were most likely to show similarities in race and poverty. These districts often had medium to high percentages of minority students and medium to high percentages of students living in poverty. Serving high percentages of students who are minorities and serving students living in poverty may place additional demands on districts, making it more difficult for them to focus on instructional issues.

Category III districts were more likely to: have fewer students living in poverty; be smaller in size; and be suburban. Most also were located in the Northeast, where there have been historic commitments to educating students with disabilities. The pattern could suggest that states with

historic commitments to implementation efforts for educating students with disabilities have had an important influence on the comprehensiveness of district policies, practices and resources.

The patterns observed in Category I and III district suggest intriguing possibilities for further research into the importance of demographic issues and the roles of states in determining the use and nature of districts' policies practices and resources relating to students with disabilities.

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